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Civil rights historian
Vincent Harding
on what it takes
to persevere for
the long haul.

Plus:

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Michelle Alexander: Stop profiting from prisons
Has Occupy jumped the shark?



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THESE ISSUES CRY OUT FOR JUSTICE

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VINCENT HARDING knows what it means to keep on keepin' on: Both his writing and his personal journey tell a story of perseverance and resilience in the pursuit of justice. Harding, who met Martin Luther King Jr. in 1958 and later published several books on King and the civil rights movement, moved to Atlanta with his wife, Rosemarie, in 1961 to set up the interracial "Mennonite House." (See Rosemarie's story of going "back South" in our February 2012 issue.)

For Vincent, the choice of going to Atlanta was a "fundamental decision ... to give ourselves to the struggle for as long as seemed right." Five decades later, Harding is still giving himself to the struggle, now as



head of the Veterans of Hope Project (co-founded with Rosemarie), which focuses on documenting the "transformative histories of 'long distance runners' for peace and justice."

Other articles in this issue highlight the need to be long distance runners in

the pursuit of social change. We offer stories of people working for a fair global economy, for compassionate treatment of immigrants, to end mass incarceration, and to reverse the causes of climate change. All of these efforts require the kind of long-term thinking and action that keeps the focus on ultimate goals—and isn't dissuaded or discouraged by the inevitable ups and downs along the way. As the old civil rights anthem put it, such a movement can only be sustained by the hope that comes as we "keep our eyes on the prize, hold on!" ■

Letters

SCHEMA FOR PEACE

In "Critical Mass" (January 2012), Karen Sue Smith's summary of changes in the U.S. Catholic Church since Vatican II, I was dismayed not to see any mention of the profound influence of the sections on peace in "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."

Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day and her friend Jim Douglass were both in Rome during the time of the Council, Day to fast for peace and Douglass to lobby bishops for a strong peace stance. And one was forthcoming: "Schema 13," as it's often called, gave Vatican grounding to the many Catholics who follow Day's lead and oppose war and preparations for war.

Douglass is one of those Catholics. He and his wife, Shelley, led the campaign against the Trident nuclear submarines, culminating in the formation of the ecumenical Agape communities. These groups tracked the ominous White Train as it traveled across the heartland of the country, bringing nuclear components to the Bangor, Washington naval base. *Sojourners* featured this campaign in its February 1984 issue, and those chilling articles and calls to resistance were my introduction to the magazine.

In a recent oral history project that collected the stories of faith-based resisters for peace, I learned of many other Catholics—lay, clergy, and vowed religious—who

"Harry Potter is no Gandhi."

were inspired by Vatican II to take their Christianity into the world in life-altering ways. Their voices continue to challenge the peace movement.

Rosalie G. Riegle
Evanston, Illinois

A GOOD WORD

I was delighted to see the article on forgiveness by Brittany Shoot ("Forgive and Forget?") in your January 2012 issue. Since she mentioned Archbishop Tutu in her article, I thought your readers would appreciate seeing an original quote from one of his 2007 speeches. The archbishop said, "Forgiveness does not mean 'forgive and forget.' It stares the beast in the eye, names the hurt, and refuses to return it, seeking not to punish but to heal." There could be no better description of the amazing and Christlike response of the Amish community in the face of tragedy.

Jeffrey Faust
Brewton, Alabama

TREATY AGAINST TRAFFICKING

The fact that the February 2012 issue contained three articles about human trafficking ("Humankind's Most Savage Cruelty," by Stewart Burns; "Here?" by Abayea Pelt;

"Works of Mercy" by Sylvia Yu) is encouraging. However, none of them mentioned the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nothing will completely stop the evil of trafficking, since it is so profitable, but the Convention has potential for reducing it more than any other device or activity. The Convention was developed in 1989, and 194 U.N. countries have ratified it. Only two have not—Somalia and the United States. *Sojourners* readers should ask the president to refer the Convention to the Senate and also ask their senators to ratify it.

Jake Terpstra
Grand Rapids, Michigan

READING TOO MUCH IN?

Harry Potter is no Gandhi. Though Bill Wylie-Kellermann ("Harry and the Principalities," November 2011) believes that Harry "never kills anyone," the whole mission of book seven was to find and destroy Horcruxes, parts of Tom Riddle's (Voldemort's) soul. Harry is not opposed to the use of force, even if it reluctantly leads to his enemy's demise.

Steve Bisset
Laurel, Maryland

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BY JIM RICE

Occupy the Future



TEN YEARS FROM now, what will the Occupy demonstrations look like in our collective rearview mirror? Is this a flash in the pan, fated to fizzle in the face of diffusion and growing animosity from authorities? Or will the movement have a lasting impact, changing the way the country—and the world—does business?

We don't need to wait 10 years to find out. Occupy is already a success.

Conservatives, and much of the mainstream media, have from the beginning sought to marginalize the protests, most commonly with variations of “they’re not specific enough about their demands.” (That one is often repeated by would-be allies as well.) More recently, right-wing figures have sought to paint the Occupiers with the “class warfare” brush.

The next few months are likely to be a defining period for the public

already succeeded, its legacy already established: It has changed the conversation.

It's easy to forget that as recently as last summer “wealth inequality” was hardly a footnote in public discourse. Few were talking about the “99 percent,” or even fairness, as programs intended to combat poverty and help the vulnerable were shoved toward the chopping block of deficit reduction.

It was a “let them eat cake” moment. Wall Street, with much taxpayer help and little oversight, seemed to have weathered the Great Recession quite well, thank you, with record bonuses and obscene profits. Main Street, on the other hand, wasn't doing so well, and as the rich got richer, the poor and the middle class kept slipping. Amazingly, despite the fact that the top 1 percent was prospering as the rest of us saw stagnated incomes, such inequality was largely ignored.

Until Occupy came along.

Now observers across the political spectrum have to at least acknowledge the huge wealth gap. For conservative pundits this is usually followed by a “but” as they seek to undermine the significance of the issue. In January, for example, Charles Krauthammer wrote that “economic inequality is an important issue, but the idea that it is the cause of America's current economic troubles is absurd.”

However, people seem to be paying more attention to Occupy's main message than to the disclaimers. A Pew study in January found that two-thirds of the public believes there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between the rich and the poor—an increase of 19 percent since 2009. And this isn't about “envy” or “class warfare,” as some would have us believe: Americans, on the whole, still aspire to move up, even though these days fewer believe

they'll get there. Rather, this is about a sense of fairness, of giving people a “fair shake.”

OCCUPY ISN'T A religious movement, although a strong sense of spirituality undergirds many of the participants. But the work it's doing—shining a spotlight on basic issues of justice and holding up the “least of these”—echoes the gospel's message of good news to the poor and setting the oppressed free.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s last effort, the Poor People's Campaign, had similar goals. As King put it 44 years ago this spring, “We are planning to dramatize the issue to the point that poor people in this nation will have to be seen and will not be invisible.”

King knew that scaling the mountain of economic inequality would bring “difficult days ahead.” He warned that working for economic justice would be a huge challenge, even compared to the battle against segregation, and would require a true “revolution of values” that would “look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.”

Finally, for King and for us today, changing attitudes—while an important first step—is just the beginning. Change doesn't happen because we wish it to be so—it comes when the will is converted to willful action. As King put it, in what could be seen as his word of encouragement and exhortation to the Occupiers and to us all, “Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God.”

Jim Rice is editor of Sojourners magazine. Hearts & Minds is on hiatus while editor-in-chief Jim Wallis is on sabbatical.

Occupy is already a success.
And spring is coming.

demonstrations. Local officials—mostly under the claim that the First Amendment is trumped by sanitation issues or, ironically, “reclaiming public space for all”—have increasingly sought to eliminate the tent cities by force, hoping that with less of a physical presence the movement will fade into insignificance.

But spring is on the way, and warmer weather promises to bring with it a resurgence of these 21st century Hoovervilles. Remember Hoovervilles? Some of the Depression-era settlements of mostly homeless people lasted 10 years—and helped push the political leaders of the 1930s to enact the whole range of New Deal programs for the poor and dispossessed. In fact, they helped change the whole social contract.

And that's where Occupy has

Yuri Timofeyev



Russian Spring?

Tens of thousands of Russians poured into the streets in Moscow in December 2011 to express outrage over fraudulent parliamentary elections that pushed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's party to a win, which set up Putin to run for president in March, circumventing constitutional term limits. This protester's sign reads "We believe, we hope, we wait!" and his hat says "Russia without Putin 2012."

By Michelle Alexander

When the Spirit Says Go

The fight against mass incarceration is joined by an emerging faith-based movement.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, when I first began writing *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, I was taking a leap of faith—trusting that people of faith and conscience would have the same awakening I did, if they had access to the history and facts about the drug war and the myriad laws authorizing discrimination against people released from prison. I trusted people would begin to see the connections between slavery, Jim Crow, and the rise of mass incarceration in America. I clung to the belief that people could and would rise to the challenge presented by this paradoxical moment in U.S. history—a time when there are more African-American men under correctional control than were enslaved in 1850, and yet a black man is president.

I prayed, literally down on my knees, that if I could just finish the book, a seed would be planted next to the many other seeds of hope and justice; that people would begin to water these seeds; and that a vibrant,

multi-ethnic movement for racial and social justice would emerge—a movement that would end not only mass incarceration but the cycle of caste creation in America.

Many people, including a few of my closest mentors, called this foolishness. I was told I was “ruining my career” as a law professor, that I should stick to writing traditional law review articles and not marginalize myself as “some kind of radical.”

I must admit that, after a while, I tried to quit writing the book. Writing it was so much more difficult than I had imagined; I started to think it wasn't worth the effort. But the Spirit was working in my life in ways that I did not fully understand.

Every time I told my husband that I was giving up, “for real this time,” a letter would show up from a prisoner or family member of someone released from prison, begging me to finish the book. I had given a few media interviews about my work-in-progress, and word had spread. One letter

from someone trapped in the system began: “You're probably thinking about quitting, as I'm sure many people are telling you not to write this book, but do it anyway. Do it for those of us who no longer have a voice.”

I now see I would have been a fool *not* to finish. A faith-based movement to end mass incarceration has been born, and while my book may not have been the catalyst, it has become an important tool—one that would not have existed if I had not listened to the Spirit whispering in my ear. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC), a network of several thousand progressive black churches, has launched a national campaign dubbed “To Be Free at Last.” The name recognizes the fact that Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream will not be realized so long as millions are locked up or relegated to a permanent second-class status—denied the right to vote, barred from juries, and legally discriminated against in employment, housing, education, and public benefits. The SDPC created

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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a faith-based study guide for *The New Jim Crow* so church study groups can explore the connections between their spiritual beliefs, the crisis of mass incarceration, and the need to stand for justice.

In a similar vein, The Veterans of Hope Project—through the leadership of Vincent Harding, one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speechwriters—is creating an interfaith study guide for the book. Harding rightly sees the movement to end mass incarceration as an extension of earlier social justice movements' spiritual commitment to the dignity, humanity, and value of all.

PICO, the nation's largest faith-based community organizing initiative, which represents more than a million families, has embraced ending mass incarceration among its core goals for its Lifelines to Healing Campaign. PICO recognizes that it is impossible to end the cycle of violence in urban communities without also ending the system of mass incarceration, a system that destroys families and eviscerates the hopes and life chances of millions of young people who are shuttled from decrepit, underfunded schools to brand new, high-tech prisons. Speaking to PICO's national clergy gathering in November, I was blown away by their commitment to engaging ordinary folks, many with no prior organizing or political experience, in meaningful,

collective action—acts of faith.

Many people of faith have been working diligently for decades to reform the criminal justice system, some in prison ministries. No doubt many have been tempted to give up, wondering if real change was possible, or if their loved ones, locked in cages, would ever come home.

This is not the time to give up. Listen to the whispers in the wind. Our time has come.

In January, the United Methodist Church announced that its moral and spiritual commitments will not allow it to profit from the caging of human beings. UMC has divested from the largest private prison companies, Corrections Corporation of America and GEO Group, and in the future will not invest in any corporation that has gross revenues of 10 percent or more from private prisons. Hopefully others will soon follow suit: No church, faith organization, or university in America should be profiting from prisons.

Change is coming. Let us join together with the "fierce urgency of now" and build the movement of our dreams. ■

Michelle Alexander is an associate professor at the Moritz College of Law and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University and author of The New Jim Crow.

By Elizabeth Palmberg

Responsible Adults

Clergy to Village Voice: It's not okay to help the sex traffickers.

THE INTERNET MAKES it easier to sell your old bicycle—but, as a growing interfaith coalition of clergy is emphasizing, it shouldn't make it easier to sell children for sex.

Two years ago, under pressure from anti-trafficking activists and 17 state attorneys general, Craigslist shut down its "adult services" section. Now, researchers say, the leading online purveyor of "adult" classified ads—which, as numerous criminal cases have shown, include ads pimps use to traffic children they have entrapped—is backpage, owned by Village Voice Media.

Rev. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, president of Auburn Theological Seminary

in New York, told *Sojourners* about the clergy activism catalyzed in fall 2011 by Groundswell, Auburn's social action initiative. The coalition's first move was a private letter to Village Voice Media, asking it to take down Backpage's adult section or to meet to discuss the issue. After getting neither of these things, the coalition went public in October with a letter, in a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, signed by 36 clergy, including *Sojourners*' CEO Jim Wallis.

Because the trafficking issue "transcends a lot of the usual polarizations," Henderson says, the coalition is wide, including "Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs,

From the Archives

March 1973

Lessons from Vietnam

I HAVE BEEN

subject so long to a Christian leadership that has spoken of living by faith, of the cost of discipleship, of how hard it is to follow Christ, of never being ashamed of the gospel, of taking up one's cross. I have listened to scores of challenging preachers and teachers talk about Christ asking for all of a person's allegiance.

Now I understand that all of this talk, which I took so seriously, has amounted to nothing more than a clearing of the throat and a shuffling of papers. The church has spiritualized out of existence the demands that Jesus made so concrete and immediate. When the crisis comes, the real message of the Christian establishment emerges: Do what you have to do to get by. Keep peace with the powers and forces that rule this nation. Don't get involved. Maintain respectability. Be conformed to this world.

One of the deepest scars from this war for me is this: I will never again be able to bring to the church my child-like trust, my boyish zeal, my naive teachability. I have been stunned into silence and disbelief by the precision with which my Christian brothers and sisters and leaders have affirmed not only the authority of the state to rule (which I also accept), but the unquestionable morality of government policy. ■

Bill Lane was a contributing editor to The Post American, the precursor to Sojourners, when this article appeared.



humanists, Buddhists.” One signatory of the public letter, Duke University Muslim chaplain Abdullah T. Antepli, told *Sojourners* that the “Quran repeatedly tells us the best way to glorify God is to serve your fellow human brother and sister. I can’t imagine any better way [to do that than to] advocate for people who are victims of the evil business called human trafficking.”

Henderson says the coalition has grown to nearly 500 clergy. An associated petition from Change.org has garnered more than 80,000 signatures. The coalition, according to Henderson, has also started “an education outreach to third parties, including advertisers.”

In December, Village Voice Media officials finally met with the group but did not

agree to remove the ad section—even though, as stories of children trafficked via Backpage continue to emerge, the attorneys general from 48 U.S. states and three territories are also advocating for the ads to come down.

Advocates aren’t giving up—and they recognize that, as it said in the *New York Times* letter, “there is much more to be done to end the sex trafficking of minors beyond” just shutting down Backpage’s adult ads. As Henderson puts it, “As clergy, one of our roles is to create awareness of hidden issues. [Trafficking] happens right here in this country, and it destroys the lives of children.” ■

Elizabeth Palmberg is an associate editor of Sojourners.

By Francesca de Gasparis

Too Little, Too Late?

The U.N. climate change talks in South Africa were a major disappointment—but the struggle continues.

THE GREEN BELT Movement, a grassroots NGO from Kenya, sent staff in November to the 17th U.N. climate change summit (COP17) in Durban, South Africa. We wanted to share our experiences using carbon offset funding with rural commu-

not addressed, be replicated by the new Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation process, which is backed by the World Bank. While the Norwegian government and others have said that the reducing emissions process is

Outside the official negotiations, faith leaders had an unprecedented presence.

nities to plant trees that restore habitat. Our mixed experience highlights some real problems faced when converting policy to practice.

Green Belt has a project financed by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a carbon offset program set up under the Kyoto Protocol. But ours is one of the few CDM tree-planting projects worldwide that has focused on grassroots engagement, indigenous tree species, and locations chosen to restore critical watersheds. The mechanism’s criteria do not distinguish between such projects and monoculture commercial plantations of non-native species. The challenges our project faced, including the lack of encouragement for locally appropriate plantings, will, if

one of the few areas that showed progress at Durban, effective criteria to ensure the success of the process are not yet in place.

Like many NGOs, the Green Belt Movement condemned the Durban talks’ final outcome as too little, too late to stop catastrophic climate change. The planet is still on track to increase in temperature up to 7 degrees Fahrenheit this century—which will be catastrophic, especially for much of Africa.

The talks’ conclusion fell short of mandating ambitious-enough emission cuts. This means the next commitment period for reduction in emissions will only come into force in 2020, long past the point of irreversible climate change. During the Durban talks, countries including the U.S.,

Canada, and New Zealand received Fossil of the Day awards from the Climate Action Network for their obvious efforts to weaken and block a potential deal.

But that is not the whole story of what happened at the climate change talks: Outside the official negotiations, faith leaders had an unprecedented presence, and NGOs, including the Green Belt Movement, gave voice to the reality of climate change that is already affecting Africans.

The Durban talks began with a mass faith rally for climate justice. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, alongside leaders of many different religions, called on governments to show moral leadership and address the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable countries, which are not responsible for that change. Faith leaders presented a petition for climate justice from people across Africa. Bishop Geoff Davies, head of Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, spoke of climate "apartheid" practiced by rich nations trying to keep power and wealth to themselves.

On the final Friday, NGOs occupied the building where the main negotiators were meeting, protesting the lack of urgency in the talks with singing and slogans reminiscent of anti-apartheid activism, and with "mic check" call and response evoking the Occupy movement. From inside the talks many country negotiators, equally frustrated by the obstructionism, applauded.

For us at the Green Belt Movement, the Durban talks were a sad time: Our founder, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, had died suddenly two months before. Maathai had planned to speak at the talks on the urgent need to take immediate action on climate change. Instead, a number of special memorials were held for Maathai, including videotaped remarks from President Barack Obama, his only direct contribution to the talks. From one former community organizer (now president of the U.S.) to another activist with Kenyan heritage—a woman who fought all her life for justice—action continues to speak louder than words. ■

Francesca de Gasparis is Europe director of Green Belt Movement International, which supports and scales up the work of Green Belt Movement Kenya.

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A Different Kind of Atheism

THERE IS A moment in the middle of the forthcoming book *Faitheist* that about took my breath away. The author, Chris Stedman, is living in Bemidji, a small town in the northern part of Minnesota near the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Stedman arrived in Bemidji hoping to escape his past in Minneapolis and to live where, as he writes, “I didn’t run into ghosts from my former Christian life that reminded me of the years I spent hating myself for being queer and unable to change it.” By the time he was a student at Augsburg College, Stedman’s disgust at religion had come to define him as deeply as his evangelical identity once had.

Stedman took a job working as a direct service professional for adults with developmental disabilities at a social services agency run by Lutherans (yes, he is self-aware enough to note the irony). His closest relationship was with a man named Marvin, a man who

Chris Stedman’s “faitheism” doesn’t hate God, it loves people.

couldn’t talk and who could barely sign. Stedman watched movies with Marvin, sat with him for hours just keeping him company, read to him from his favorite books.

One day Marvin brought Stedman into his room and placed in his hands one of Marvin’s most precious possessions, his prayer book. He wanted Stedman to read from it. Stedman hesitated for a second. Perhaps he was reminded of all those nights he lay awake searching through scripture verses, hoping to find one that would make him feel loved for how God made him. Perhaps he was reminded of the time when, in a drunken rage, he kicked in the glass panel of a church sign.



Chris Stedman,
author of
Faitheist.

Default Interfaith

But neither longing nor anger overcame him now. This moment was about what it means to be a friend, about expressing care for something Marvin values. Stedman read Marvin a prayer. Marvin pressed his face tightly to Stedman’s blue flannel shirt and kept it there for a long time.

One cannot imagine the late Christopher Hitchens performing that intimate act of mercy. Or Sam Harris, or Daniel Dennett, or Richard Dawkins or any of the other prominent so-called New Atheists you’ve probably heard of. More likely, they would have whipped out a lecture, or maybe an insult.

Like all good personal stories, *Faitheist* casts light on an important dimension of our public life—in this case the growing chasm between believers and atheists. It was a chasm first opened by believers, who have too often mercilessly berated and bullied nonbelievers in ways antithetical to the values of respect, compassion, and freedom central to all our faiths, and one recently widened by the aggressive response of certain

nonbelievers.

Chris Stedman heralds a different kind of atheism. His atheism doesn’t hate God, it loves people. He is proud of who he is (gay, atheist, Minnesotan, heavily tattooed, staff member at the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard, writer), and he wants to create a world where all people are free to be proud of who they are—Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, atheist, wanderer, whatever. He believes that the atheist movement ought to be talking more about what it stands for than what it doesn’t. He believes energy spent hating on what others do or believe is worse than wasteful, it’s toxic. His goal is to nurture a movement of humanists who emphasize cultivating humanity, express it in serving others, and work with people of all faiths, in good faith, toward that end. We get there together, Stedman believes, or not at all. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, was awarded the 2012 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize.



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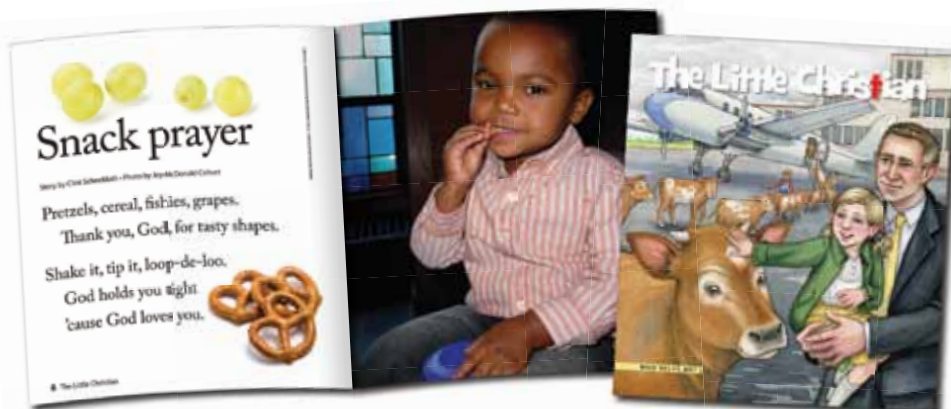
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The Little Christian



The Common Bond of Blood

ROBI DAMELIN HAS always fought injustice. Growing up in South Africa, she spoke out against apartheid and worked actively for co-existence. In 1967, she moved to Israel—"to solve the conflict," she says with self-deprecating humor. She ended up working on a kibbutz. "Ever since then," she told me, "I have had a love-hate relationship with this country." She loves the reality of a homeland for the Jewish people, but she hates the oppression of Palestinian people that results from the Israeli military occupation. "Israel will never be free until the Palestinians are free," she says.

Robi's son, David, shared her perspective about the occupation. Robi claims he "would rather have gone to jail than serve in the military, but he knew that as soon as he was released, he'd just be posted somewhere else. In the end we agreed it would be better for him to serve as an officer and set an exam-

"Do you invest your pain in revenge, or do you think creatively?"

ple to other soldiers by behaving like a human being." David fulfilled his required service, but in 2002 he was called up to the reserves. Again, he and Robi decided he should serve and set an example.

But as a soldier "he was a symbol of an occupying army." On March 3, 2002, 28-year-old David Damelin was killed by a Palestinian sniper.

"I was beside myself with grief," says Robi. "I had all the good things in life, but it all became totally irrelevant. I just wanted to prevent other families from experiencing this." Robi was invited to a meeting where she met Palestinian mothers who had also lost children. "I saw there was no difference in our pain. I realized that through our joint



Activist Robi Damelin

Reuters

pain we could speak out and make a difference."

Robi closed her public relations business and became a spokesperson for The Parents Circle (www.theparentscircle.com), a group of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost an immediate family member in the conflict. Robi spends her time traveling the world to spread the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace.

"Reconciliation is not about hugging and eating hummus. It is about understanding the needs of the other," Robi explains. "You need to view history through the human eye." Together, members of the Parents Circle study each other's personal and historical narratives. During a typical learning experience, they visited Yad Vashem (the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem), listened to lectures by Israeli and Palestinian historians, then visited an Arab village destroyed by Israelis in 1948.

At the village, one Palestinian mother saw the well she had used as a child. "That helped me understand why she walks around with the key to her family's house, wishing she could return," said Robi. "These experiences create empathy."

In 2010, an Israeli

marketing firm challenged creative thinkers throughout the world to come up with a way to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. The result was Blood Relations (www.bloodrelations.org), which provides a catalyst for dialogue by demonstrating people's shared humanity through the common bond of blood. The effort was launched in Tel Aviv in September 2011, when Israeli and Palestinian members of the Parents Circle publicly donated their blood to Israeli and Palestinian hospitals as a symbolic act of healing. Robi donated her blood while seated next to a Palestinian mother whose son had also been killed.

"The pain of David's death never goes away," says Robi. "But what do you do with this pain? Do you invest it in revenge, or do you think creatively?"

People ask why I have hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. How can I not have hope when there are people like Robi Damelin? ■



Lynne Hybels is co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. Robi Damelin's story is documented in the film Encounter Point (www.justvision.org/encounterpoint).



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An Obama poster
on a wall in
Washington, D.C.

'DO NOT GROW WEARY OR LOSE HEART'

Many people who were hopeful for change in the wake of Barack Obama's election have become disillusioned by the rancorous politics of the last few years. What does it take to sustain the struggle for justice over the long haul?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Jesus, who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. —Hebrews 12:1-3

ARE THERE ANY remaining glimmers of hope in politics today? Such questions seem to me to be absolutely connected to the passage from the letter to the Hebrews. One thing that it says to me is that we do not have the luxury of falling into despair. There are too many folks who have fought too long and given too much and found their way through too many disappointments and seeming failures for us to say, oh, it just didn't work, and, I'm finished with that stuff.

When you're surrounded by Fannie Lou Hamer and Amzie Moore and Septima Clark and Malcolm X and Martin King and Ella J. Baker, and when you take seriously those lives and the thousands like them, then it seems to me that the first response to what we've been through in these last few years is the question that one of my friends said she is always asking: What is the gift? For she assumes that life is full of gifts, sometimes absolutely disguised gifts. She assumes that whatever we are in the midst of, especially when it's fear-provoking and despair-encouraging, it is so necessary, so important, to keep

asking, "What is the gift here?"

I am reminded of something that one of the great residents of Washington, D.C., used to say back in the '70s, when he was getting very old and getting even spicier in his capacity to speak the truth. Thurgood Marshall, our first African-American Supreme Court justice, used to say, "Just think of it: Those slave owners and slave traders said they were building a democracy. They didn't know anything about building a democracy. What do slave owners and slave traders know about building a democracy?" But he didn't stop there. He said, "What that means is that every generation since then has got to do the job that they couldn't do, that they weren't qualified to do. We have to build that democracy that does not yet exist."

We started with a beginning that was essentially flawed—trying to put together democracy and slavery, trying to put together democracy and capitalism. And, praise God, some of us crazily trying to figure out how to put together democracy and following Jesus. That's where we are.

We are in a fascinating, powerful, and



Those who believe in
democracy will not get
democracy just by
talking about it.

perplexing time. My assumption is that's why we were created with such tremendous capacities: to deal with perplexing situations. That's why some of us believe that there is within us the creative power of the universe, that God dwells in us. Now, what's the point of God dwelling with us if we don't have any tough jobs to do? God's wasting God's time, if there is no tough stuff to work on. For me, right now, the building of a democracy called America is the toughest job that we have to work on. The stuff that we are going through now is part of the context, part of the material that's here for us.

One of the critical parts of the material that we have to work on is the gift of being taught that, in a true democracy, it is absolutely dangerous to focus our hope and attention on one elected official. Democracy is meant to build our gifts as the people, to focus our gifts and to bring our gifts in connection with the gifts of the leaders—but never to leave the leaders alone, just because “they are our leaders.” That is not democracy. All leadership comes from within.

THE GREAT CLOUD of witnesses that Hebrews talks about includes Mother Jones, who said, “Don't mourn. Organize!” I would say mourn and organize.

As someone who is 80 years old, and a historian of this country and its life, I am constantly living with the reality that this country is just a bit over 200 years old. In the light of human history, that's no time. We are, in a sense, in our childhood as a nation. At best, we are gawky teenagers as a nation. Always wanting everything now. Always overreacting to everything. Two hundred years.

The fact is, it's only been for the last 60 years that we have even begun to commit ourselves to say out loud that we want a multiracial democracy. And so, when it comes to building a multiracial democracy, we are a developing nation, with no authority to bomb democracy into anybody. Because we are trying to figure out right now what it means.

As for the money question, the compassion question, the racial question, now the religious question—all of these are things that we have to take hold of. We should not see them primarily as more burdens, but, “Lord, what a gift you are giving us to try to make a nation out of this stuff. Wow.”

It seems to me that's the spirit we need to bring. And many ask, How do you struggle when folks are constantly pushing back? I can only say, How else do you struggle? That's what makes struggle—not constant victories, but getting up after you have been knocked down, again and again. That is what makes for your faith in the fact that you are a follower of the One who took up the cause.

I am constantly being reminded of one of my great heroes, W.E.B. Dubois, who was alive and young and full of life in 1896, when the Supreme Court of the United States said it's all right to keep black people over here, as far over here as possible. Out of the mainstream. Dubois was not yet 30. What I know is that Dubois did not stop struggling until he died in 1963. So four years, the period of a presidential term, is nothing. It's breathing time. It's time to get together again and again and say, now, what is the gift? What should we be doing? What should I be doing?

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, is one of those magnificent women who was at the heart of the freedom movement. She has her hands on one of the most critical issues that we are facing now as a nation: what it means to have the kind of poverty rate where more than a fifth of our children are poor.

When Marian was in her senior year at Spellman College, back in 1960, she wrote this in her diary: “Now, as never before, is the chance offered to do something. This is a history-making epoch, where we, me, the young, can be major characters. Now is the time to act, to work, to sacrifice. Life is so pressing. Time is so strained. I'm very frantic in my quest to use it, not to waste it. Now is the time. Each moment must be made to count.” She was 21 years old then. She's 72 now, still working at the tasks.

IF THIS PERIOD of blowback over the last few years does anything, it must encourage us to recognize that we are still children when it comes to building a democracy. We've got work to do. It will not come automatically. Nobody—no president—is going to give it to us. We've got work to do, and we've got to figure out how to organize the work. How do we plan for the work? Can it be work done in chapels, as often as we can? Can it be work in places where we live, where we eat together, where we meet together?

What is the work that we should be doing?

What we need to know is that those who do *not* believe in democracy are working. Those who *do* believe in democracy will not get democracy just by talking about democracy.

I was very glad to be here for Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009. I came here with my mind deeply influenced by Brother Barack's memoir, *Dreams from My Father*. I believed, and I still believe, that he has within him the capacity to be much more than he has been up to now.

The question is, what do we do now? We know what we shouldn't do now, in terms of dependence on the Democratic Party, as it is, on the president, as he is.

How do we move us and them to another place, so that the richest country in the world will not have more than 20 percent of its children in poverty?

We simply have to recognize that we are wrestling with something that is powerful. The gift of that is that we now have the opportunity to see how much power there is in our lives to deal with it, if we will submit ourselves to the magnificent calling:

- that we have to take our lives away from the foolishness that the society wants us to be wrapped up in and to focus ourselves on the building of a new world.

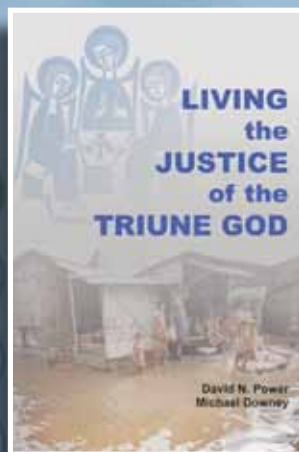
- that there is the company of witnesses, the cloud of witnesses.

- that there is the loving Master who is available to us.

- that there is a community of folks who we will never know until we stand up and say, "I am tired. I am angry. I am beaten. I need some help. Please help me." We will never find it until we do that work of letting others know that we want to be servants of a new humanity. And then see what the end will be. You've got to just keep at it. ■

Vincent Harding, author of *Hope and History* and *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, is a *Sojourners* contributing editor. This article is adapted from a fall 2011 interview with Dr. Harding by *Sojourners* editor-in-chief Jim Wallis in Washington, D.C.

We are still children when it comes to building a democracy.



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Above, Hector Mendez, like many Mexican and Central American immigrants, found a job at Cottonwood Dairy near Darlington, Wisconsin, shortly after owner James Winn, right, with Miguel Aguilar, expanded his operation. Winn said he needed more workers to help milk the larger herd, and local residents were unreliable or uninterested. At far right, Mexican immigrant Elizabeth Madrid also works at Cottonwood Dairy.



Photos courtesy of Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

LAND OF MILK AND IMMIGRANTS

A new wave of arrivals makes its mark in America's dairy country.

IMMIGRANTS FOUNDED the U.S. In western Wisconsin, where I live, people came in the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries from Germany, Switzerland, and Norway, lured by the pull of free land to homestead and pushed out of their home countries by adverse economic conditions. Many of these immigrants settled close to each other for protection and comfort. They first began their dairy farms, then started building churches, schools, and businesses. The local newspaper was printed in German until World War I. We still have areas known as Norwegian Valley, or Tell (named for the Swiss).

The dairy industry's story, which began to be written by these first-wave immigrants, continues to be written by today's immigrants.

During the first half of the 20th century, a farm of 40 to 100 cows became the landmark of this area, because it was the size one family could operate. The hours were long, the work hard, but one could provide for a family comfortably.

Fast forward to the 1980s. Many factors made it harder for dairy farmers to make a comfortable living with this number of cows. The family farm was disappearing. If people wanted to stay in business, farms needed to grow. That meant hiring employees—but from where? Young people were leaving the area, migrating to the cities to be educated and to find jobs that matched their skills. Increasingly, dairy producers have had a harder time finding local

people to do the honest, but not glamorous, work.

Enter immigrants once again, this time from rural Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Many found jobs on the dairy farms, living in houses provided by their employers. They're part of a larger trend; the foreign-born share of Wisconsin's population grew from 2.5 percent in 1990 to 4.4 percent in 2008.

Like earlier Swiss and German immigrants to this area, the more recent arrivals are lured by the pull factor of jobs and pushed out by adverse economics. I have worked as an interpreter and cultural consultant on many of these dairy farms for 10 years, and almost all the immigrants I have worked with tell me that there aren't jobs in their home villages, and few opportunities.

Ericka, for example, had resolved early in life to migrate. In elementary school, she had to borrow a pair of nice shoes to wear to a contest; her thrill at winning was killed when she realized she'd ruined her cousin's shoes walking to the event seven miles from home. She promised herself that she would come to the U.S. so her children would always have shoes.

Roberto worked for years milking cows in Wisconsin, building up capital so that he could return to Mexico, become an entrepreneur, and help his rural community: "I now have a business producing tomatoes in greenhouses, and I employ several people here," he wrote me. "I have also helped to get our [local] road graveled, so we can get back and forth in cars."

BEING PAID WHAT local people in Wisconsin are paid was huge for these immigrants—10 times what they may have made in Mexico, if they had

"How wonderful that you have welcomed us and trust in us."



Photos by Jacob Kushner





Immigrants say life here is good, but they would like to not have to live in the shadows.

Above, John Rosenow began employing immigrant workers on his dairy after expanding his farm in 1997. At right, one of an estimated 5,000 immigrant dairy workers in Wisconsin.

been lucky enough to have steady work.

Much to the delight of dairy producers, these folks became an integral part of the dairy industry, which had been struggling to find workers. A Buffalo County dairy producer told me about his previous difficulties working for 90 hours a week because he'd been unable to find people to hire. "I would go to the Fleet Farm Store and ask people if they would want to come and work for me. I would offer to pay more, and they didn't want to. I hired a retired policeman. He worked for two weeks, and called me one day: 'I can't do this work; it is too stressful.'" Today, 40 percent of the dairy industry's hired labor is from the immigrant population.

Many immigrants tell me that life here is good, mostly. But many are undocumented, and they say that they would like to not have to live in the shadows. Such a life means either not driving or driving without a license—worrying, every time they get in their car, whether this is the time they'll be pulled over. It means knowing that if you go to the doctor, you, unlike many Anglos, will be singled out and told to pay a deposit up front. One lady I know was told she wasn't welcome to shop at a garage sale she visited.

For many dairy farmers, who often start out very culturally "monolingual," hiring immigrants means becoming involved with them on a personal basis. With an average of eight to 10 employees, working side by side, family members and employees coexist at dairies in Wisconsin and Minnesota. In that

relationship, they truly begin to care about each other; co-workers become real people, breaking through preconceptions.

One farmer, Chris, told me he'd been exposed to biased images of Mexicans "way back to my youth, watching television with my family on Saturday nights; the stereotype of a person south of Texas was lazy and maybe not responsible." But after working with employees from Mexico, he says, "They are so much like our Midwestern heritage of strong religious families. The dairy industry is finding that out. The frustrating part is our government still has the mindset of their youth and is not willing to grant proper working status for the people that come across the border looking to provide a better life financially for their families."

In my work, I do whatever I can to facilitate understanding between the farmers and their Latino employees. I take dairy producers to Mexico to meet the families of their employees. This is life-changing for them: To see something so different from our lives now, yet so similar to their grandparents', helps them to understand why their employees feel pushed out of Mexico and pulled to the U.S. Chris went for the first time in 2001, and has gone several times since.

When I go to Mexico, I always take things from the fathers and husbands working in the Midwest. When I deliver these clothes and stuffed animals in Mexico, I feel like I'm Santa Claus. And then I am always asked to take some things back to Wisconsin from the children, mothers, and wives—local medicines to take care of illnesses, beans, coffee, photos, all wrapped up in handmade tortilla towels—things that bring a feeling of home to their loved ones far away. I am doubly blessed to be the bearer.

WITH TIME, SOME of these immigrants to the upper Midwest are opening businesses, adding to the local economy. Our counties enjoy at least two restaurants, a dance hall, and grocery stores owned by Latinos. Javier, an immigrant, and his wife Kelly, daughter of immigrants, drove the "tortilla truck" for several years before starting a local grocery store and a restaurant famous for its authentic Mexican food. Both have been a big success. In this same small city, the local Hmong farmers market has invigorated the area; the locale of the market is now an event center, drawing people from

Photos by Robert Gutsche Jr.



throughout the area for evening concerts.

Schools have always been a central focus for any rural community. With dwindling native-born populations, there is always the fear of the school closing or consolidating. Immigrants' children are now keeping the schools populated. I remember Erick's graduation—the first immigrant child to graduate from Durand High School, and the first from his family in Mexico to do so. I don't know who was prouder—his family or the Durand teachers and student body. He participated in band, baseball, football, and wrestling, and was liked by all.

Churches, also, are building new relationships. In the Lutheran church in the small Wisconsin town of Eleva, a dairy employee asked, as did immigrants of an earlier time, "Why can't we have worship in our own language?" Faith communities such as Eleva Lutheran are beginning to respond. Baptisms, weddings, and occasionally other worship services are conducted in Spanish, sometimes followed by festive gatherings in church fellowship halls. Sanctuaries that once had the unmistakable aroma of lutefisk wafting up from dinners being cooked below now have worshippers smelling tortillas. Many people are realizing that churches need to look ahead to a future that includes the recent immigrant population—and these are people who want to belong.

Recently, a Pepin County Catholic church saw its first procession honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe. On Dec. 11, people from the Mexican-American and Anglo communities ran together from one

church to another to venerate the patron saint of the Americas.

With the help of First Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Jorge Cevera, a minister in training and himself an immigrant, is growing a grassroots ministry in Eleva and neighboring communities. Having once been undocumented himself, he understands many of the local immigrants and can relate: "What

Family and employees at dairies truly begin to care about each other.

makes this ministry unique is that these folks come with traditions and faith; they look to the church to find someone who will give them welcome. 'How wonderful that you have welcomed us and trust in us'—both Latinos and 'gringos' say this."

I WORK WITH more than 40 dairy farms in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, and each one agrees strongly that if it weren't for the Latino employees, they would not be in business. If the dairy goes out of business, then what happens to the feed supplier, mechanics, technicians, and veterinarians? What about the implement dealer and the creamery to which the milk is taken? What about the price everyone would pay for dairy products if there were many fewer dairies? These are just a few of the relationships and connections that are crucial to a dairy and to the communities in which they are located.

The hand that wields the hammer, that

picks the strawberry, or that milks the cow is the hand that helps to build our community. Whether workers come from Mexico or Minnesota, their labor keeps dairyland communities alive—and also helps ensure an inexpensive food supply nationwide. These new community members who don't speak English pay taxes just like everyone else. They pay cash when they go to the doc-

tor. They buy gas, groceries, and clothes in local stores.

In a culture where we always want to "get down to business," we can learn that the person with whom you have business is far more important than the actual business. It's a gift simply to greet people, be invited to their homes, and enjoy their hospitality and food. It enables us to learn not merely to accept our differences, but to appreciate our differences, embrace them, and give thanks for them. On farms and in factories, in churches and schools, and among new friends visiting outside small-town stores and around kitchen tables, these new immigrants are adding a vital dimension to the fabric of the Wisconsin countryside. ■

Shaun Duvall is the founder of Puentes/Bridges (www.puentesbridgessjd.org) and owner of SJD Language & Culture Services, LLC.

JUBILEE AND BEYOND

**The Bible-inspired movement set the standard—
and the inspiration—for future campaigns for change.**

OVER THE LAST three decades, reclaiming the biblical concept of Jubilee has proven a powerful rallying point for campaigners demanding that the debts of the world's poorest nations be cancelled. People of faith have been inspired to find that an Old Testament principle of debt cancellation (see Leviticus 25) could have such contemporary relevance. As a commentary in the British newspaper *The Observer*, normally skeptical towards Christianity, said in 1999, "So who said religion was dead and there was no God? ... it is no longer [economists] Morris, Keynes, and

little more than a placebo.

Meanwhile, interest rates soared as a result of the U.S. and U.K.'s monetary policies, while the prices poor countries received for commodities they produced continued to plummet. The debt owed by developing countries more than doubled during the late 1980s—until, for every dollar given in aid, three dollars were being returned in debt payments.

Throughout the 1990s the pressure mounted. In 1996, the World Bank and IMF launched a new initiative—the Heavily

Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) scheme, which aimed to write off certain countries' debt to the World Bank and the IMF to "achieve debt sustainability." But the

**One of the world's greatest injustices
was finally being tackled—the relentless
flow of resources from poor to rich.**

Beveridge who inspire and change the world. It's Leviticus."

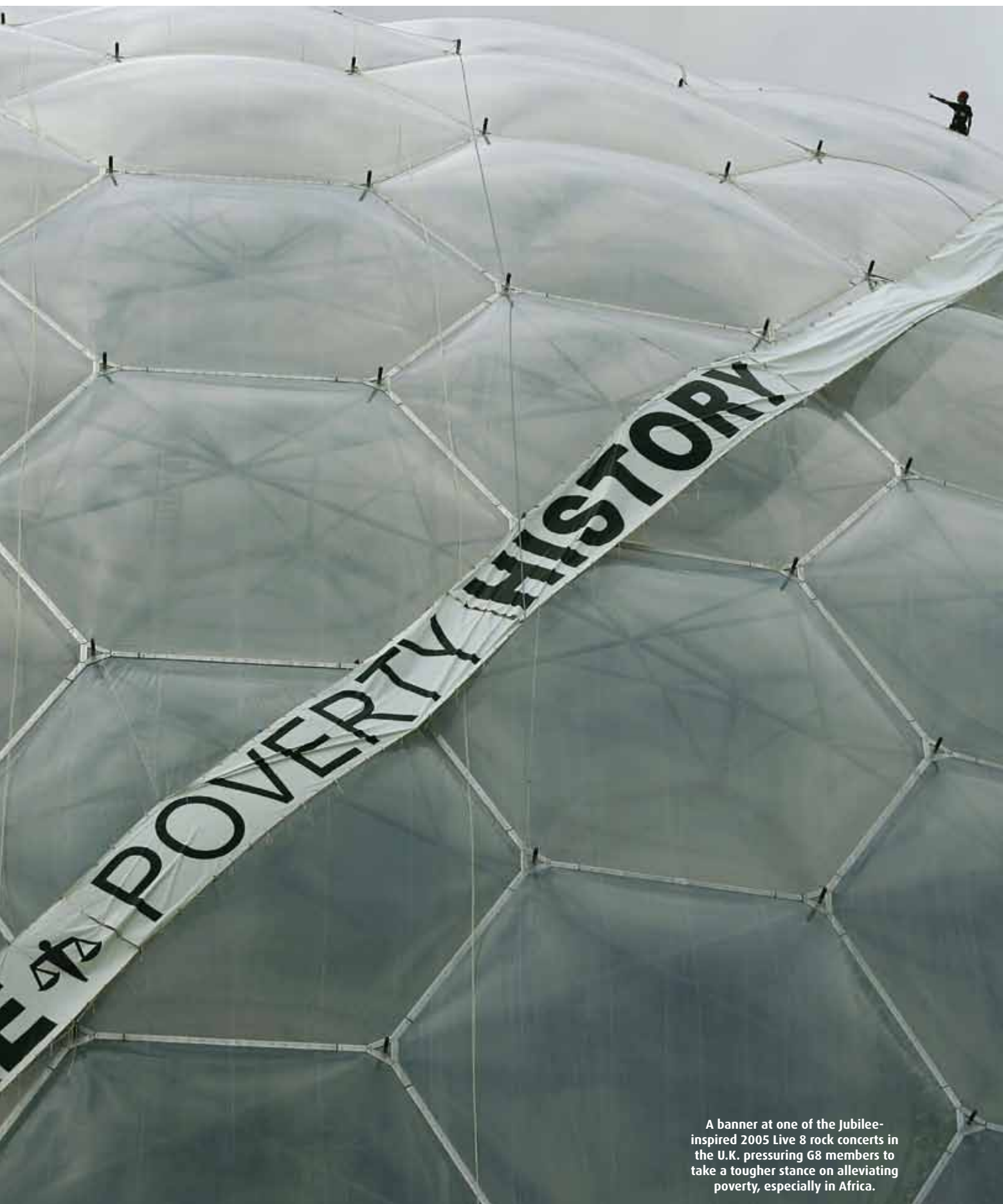
The cancellation of debt was no new idea, even to the modern world. Generous 1953 debt release helped Germany become a responsible player in a postwar Europe. Later Indonesia, seen as a bulwark against communism, was allowed to pay its debt to the group of rich creditor nations, the Paris Club, interest-free, over 30 years. From the early 1980s, U.K. campaigners had been arguing that poor countries should also get debt cancellation. Yet the response from the Paris Club was half-hearted. Plan after plan—the Brady Plan, the Baker Plan, the Naples Terms, the London Terms, the Houston Terms—was

program, especially as originally announced, was limited in scope. The following year, the Jubilee 2000 Coalition brought together campaigners from faith-based and humanitarian organizations, aiming to achieve substantial debt reduction by the end of the millennium.

The call to "break the chains" was visually eloquent. When the leaders of the rich G8 countries met in May 1998, 70,000 people formed a human chain in Birmingham, England. Journalists interviewed celebrities such as Bono, thinkers from the global South, and justice-seekers from the U.S. and Europe. The British prime minister left the G8 gathering early to meet protest leaders.

The tipping point had come: Jubilee





A banner at one of the Jubilee-inspired 2005 Live 8 rock concerts in the U.K. pressuring G8 members to take a tougher stance on alleviating poverty, especially in Africa.



In 2010, members of the Jubilee Debt Campaign's Make Poverty History project performed a musical flash mob in Sydney, Australia, calling on the government to increase aid to poor nations.

Getty Images

2000 was acknowledged as a justice movement that mobilized an enormous popular response. Jubilee formed human chains in Madras and Madrid, Osaka and Oslo, Durban and Denver. On what would become the world's largest petition ever, 24 million signatures poured in from 166 countries.

BY THE END of 2000, rich nations had promised to write off billions of dollars of debt owed by poor countries. A decade later, Stephen Rand, a leading figure in the movement, reflected on Jubilee's success: "Promises have been kept, with \$88 billion

It formed the Make Poverty History coalition, which targeted the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland. More positive responses from the world leaders led to further transfers of money back into the coffers of poor nations, with accompanying benefits for infrastructure, health, and education. An IMF report in November 2011 showed that in heavily indebted poor countries, spending on social services was now, on average, five times the amount of debt-service payments.

Jubilee was probably the first really global campaign to achieve a populist impact. In an era before the advent of Facebook or Twitter,

During the late 1980s, for every dollar given in aid, three were being returned in debt payments.

of debt cancelled ... There are children in school, teachers employed, immunizations given, antiretroviral drugs made available, water and sanitation improved." One of the world's greatest areas of injustice was finally being tackled—the relentless flow of resources from poor to rich.

The World Bank report of September 2006 on HIPC found that, in countries receiving debt relief, poverty reduction initiatives between 1999 and 2005 rose nearly 30 percent—from an average of 7 percent of the national economy to more than 9 percent. Increased spending on health and education brought immediate benefits. Tanzania did away with school fees, built more schools, and hired additional teachers. Uganda's \$1 billion debt cancellation meant that the number of children in school doubled. Mozambique's \$67 million relief was diverted to hospitals and housing. Burkina Faso slashed the price of life-saving medicines and increased access to safe drinking water.

As Jubilee 2000 came to an end, the Jubilee Debt Campaign picked up the work.

Jubilee showed it could marshal millions of people worldwide, present them with crucial arguments and draw them toward a single focus—the cancellation of debt. The strategies and methods it built up are now a standard for effective global engagement, referenced in management and development textbooks.

Jubilee's extraordinary efforts empowered those whose voices had been muted or ignored and helped revitalize some of the world's poorest economies. Skeptics initially shrugged off the campaign because they felt the economics of international debt were too complex for people at the grassroots level. They were proven wrong. Once people's passions had been stirred, they threw themselves into grasping the issues and made them their own. Government officials were taken aback at the level of serious engagement and technical argument that poured into their mailboxes from "ordinary" people.

Jubilee also ensured that debt release stayed firmly on the international agenda. When the earthquake struck Haiti in 2010,

campaigners were ready to lobby parliamentarians and international governments for relief of Haiti's debt—but there was no need. Within 24 hours of the international crisis, political leaders themselves were insisting that debts must be cancelled to kick-start the country's economy and help it begin to rebuild.

THE JUBILEE MOVEMENT has given us insights into debt crises that have proved prophetic in our current First World debt turmoil. Its old warnings—about the way irresponsible lending, spiraling debt, and economic crisis affect the poor—have again hit home. Once more, the poor pick up the tab, facing house repossession, unemployment, hardship, and financial struggle, while the rich find ways of protecting themselves and the bankers get their bonuses.

Although the international financial crisis has distracted people from the debt crisis in the global South, that crisis is by no means over. Injustice, exploitation, and imbalances of power still characterize relationships between rich and poor nations. Many more of the world's poorest realms are still in need of debt cancellation. Campaigners have found how easy it is to lose ground already gained, especially when promises are not implemented, loopholes not closed, and the pressure of advocacy not maintained.

New threats and challenges have required the Jubilee movement to adapt and take fresh initiatives. One challenge is the need for international processes that will end damaging "conditionality." While it's reasonable to require accountability and financial clarity from an indebted country in exchange for debt relief, the conditions imposed by HIPC arguably go way beyond this into attempted micromanagement of impoverished countries' economies by the IMF and World Bank. Very often, this means the IMF requires monetary policies that reduce—even eliminate—the amount of debt relief that can be spent on social services. Tanzania is often quoted as an example, where dozens of conditions were imposed, including raising the country's value-added tax and adopting a drastic privatization policy.

Another challenge is the need to monitor future lending; the fear is that countries may build up more debt to replace that which

Continued on Page 45



Jubilee USA photo

WHAT'S NEXT FOR JUBILEE USA?

The Bible speaks of a “year of the Lord’s favor”—the year of Jubilee.

We need it now more than ever. *by* ERIC LeCOMPTE

IN LUKE’S GOSPEL, Jesus begins his public ministry by speaking of the “year of the Lord’s favor”—the year of Jubilee. The Hebrew scriptures lay out this process, in which a society regularly forgives debts, restores land, and sets captives free. This was actually practiced in ancient times and protected all people from losing or gaining too much.

Jubilee USA Network arose as a part of the global movement to forgive unjust debt and, together with Jubilee partners in 50 countries, continues to work to reform the international financial system to protect and ensure the participation of the most vulnerable. We are a coalition of 200 congregations and 75 organizations in the U.S., including groups such as Sojourners, the Episcopal Church, and the AFL-CIO.

Now that international debt crises have migrated from the global South to the North, we are seeing new opportunities to enfold the biblical concept of Jubilee: We are advocating, and decision-makers are considering, real solutions to deal with the root causes of the international financial crises.

At Jubilee USA, we believe that to reduce the need for international lending, we need to restore revenue in poor countries. Between 2000 and 2008, the developing world lost \$6.5 trillion in tax evasion and other illicit financial flows—if that money had been taxed even modestly, it would have eliminated

the debt crises in the developing world. That is why this year Jubilee USA helped to launch the Financial Accountability and Corporate Transparency Coalition (the FACT Coalition) and helped introduce legislation to close tax havens, end corporate secrecy, and stop international tax avoidance to end the need for poor country borrowing and restore revenues to the developing world.

When lending happens, we must ensure it is fair, and arbitration must be created for existing loans. This is why Jubilee USA is working to introduce the bipartisan Jubilee Act to instruct the Treasury Department to work for responsible lending and borrowing within the international financial system and to create an international bankruptcy court. Finally, our current work also includes working for greater transparency and popular participation in the international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

The time is now for real solutions to the international debt crises. The concept of a real, biblical Jubilee has never been more relevant. ■

Eric LeCompte is executive director of the Jubilee USA Network (jubileeusa.org).

Above: During the 2010 International Monetary Fund meetings, Jubilee USA organized protests outside the White House.

HEAVENLY ENERGY

In the wake of last year's Fukushima disaster, German chancellor Angela Merkel announced the country would phase out nuclear power. Churches are at the forefront of Germany's new solar revolution.

IMAGINE A CHURCH that not only views taking care of the earth as a fundamental Christian value, but whose green consciousness is at the heart of its gospel; a church that not only talks about responsible stewardship, but has photovoltaic systems mounted on its rooftops; a church that not only feeds solar power into the local grid, but inspires and supports other congregations to follow suit.

A Lutheran congregation and its intrepid pastor in the small Black Forest town of Schönau (population 2,382) are at the forefront of the solar revolution in Germany. With 431 solar modules on its rooftops, Schönau's Bergkirche (Mountain Church) generates more than 40,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity each year, enough for eight churches of its size. Dubbed "Creation Windows," the installation feeds what Pastor Peter Hasenbrink calls "heavenly energy" into the local grid that's run by one of Germany's largest cooperative clean energy companies.

The Creation Windows didn't happen overnight. The seed was first sown when a handful of concerned parents, alarmed by the dangers of nuclear power after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, turned to their church for support. Ursula Sladek, a mother of five and 2011 Goldman Environmental Prize recipient, recalls telling her husband, Michael, a doctor who was a member of Bergkirche's council at the time, "This is also the church's concern, because we're dealing with God's creation here. We can't just destroy it like that!"

As the Sladeks and their friends went on to educate themselves about safer alternatives to nuclear power, they found a natural ally in Rev. Hasenbrink.

"God has put a lot of love into this creation," Hasenbrink says, explaining what he considers the natural affinity between faith and environmental stewardship. "When you look around, you can only be in awe of how well-conceived everything is, and we humans are called upon to not only be beneficiaries but to intelligently and responsibly sustain this creation."

While they couldn't yet afford a photovoltaic installation in the early 1990s, Bergkirche made another important contribution to the cause: a space to assemble. As more and more of the group's meetings took place at the church's community center, the relationship between the concerned residents and the congregation naturally deepened. Casual gatherings turned into electricity seminars that were then adopted into Hasenbrink's services.

In his sermons, Hasenbrink would point to the importance of combining inner and outer work, citing St. Paul's letters in Romans 8—"For the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children"—as a call to action for us caretakers to relieve the strain on the earth, to signal our participation, and to move toward salvation. "Not that we humans can or should salvage the world—Christ himself must do this—but we are God's collaborators in sustaining this work of creation," Hasenbrink says. "For me, and for the Christian community, this is the task of our time."

At first, these communal efforts at conserving and bringing more renewable energy to Schönau faced stiff opposition. Most notably, KWR, the power company that was operating the local power

Photo courtesy of Mountain Church. Background: Getty Images.

"This is the church's concern, because we're dealing with God's creation here."



With 431 solar modules on its rooftops, Schönau's Bergkirche (Mountain Church) in Germany's Black Forest generates more than 40,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity each year, enough for eight churches of its size.



grid at the time, would have none of it. The response the Sladeks got when they first asked company officials if they'd be willing to add a few energy-saving measures was, "Conserve energy? Have you lost your mind? We want to *sell* energy, not *save* it!"

As shocking as KWR's attitude was to the concerned community, it forced all the stakeholders to take a stand. The Sladeks and their friends decided that if the power company wasn't going to be accountable to their customers and there was no alternative choice, the customers would have to start their own power company. Thus began a six-

that by launching a communal church project with the sun at its center, Bergkirche would be able to foster reconciliation among the different factions in town and help everyone to learn and grow from the experience.

The name "Creation Windows" was a cinch. "We thought, wouldn't it be a great metaphor of what a church should be doing anyway, transforming the power of God into energy for our daily life? Just as electricity is a symbol of light and power, faith is a symbol of the power that God gives us to have hope and trust in humanity, to help each other and to co-create." The first unexpected encouragement came when Hasenbrink went to the venerable Lutheran state council and

"If we wait until powerful leaders start to do good, the train will long have left the station."

year campaign, including two hard-fought referendums to challenge KWR's monopoly, that would pit proponents of a people-run renewable power grid against more cautious residents who thought it was a naive pipe dream and would only lead to blackouts.

Caught in the middle of this conflict, the church's position was to give the underdogs an opportunity to prove themselves. "Even if you weren't 100 percent convinced that it could be done," Hasenbrink remembers thinking, "they should at least get a chance to try."

In the heat of this fierce battle for the town's energy future, Hasenbrink had an epiphany.

"THERE WERE A lot of hurt feelings on both sides," Hasenbrink recalls. "For our part, we wanted to be conciliatory, so we said we need a symbol not *against*, but *for* something." Recognizing the sun as a universally positive symbol, Hasenbrink thought

received its blessing. The council's enthusiastic response—"Finally, someone with a good idea who stands for something!"—was a clear sign to Hasenbrink that they were on the right path.

The biggest obstacle standing in the way of Hasenbrink's solar vision proved to be red tape from the office of landmark preservation, which balked at the idea of altering the church roof. It was an ironic development, considering that Hasenbrink had turned to the landmark office in the first place to make sure the panels would fit into the historic landscape to alleviate some of his more traditionalist congregants' concerns about the physical look of the church building. However, the landmark office maintained that glass should not be put on a church and refused to grant a permit. Case closed.

As more people became involved and realized that the church would actually look *more* beautiful than before in addition to generating surplus electricity, the excitement

about working toward this common goal reached a critical mass. With the 150-year anniversary of their state's 1848 revolution imminent, Hasenbrink and Sladek came up with the idea to mark the occasion by staging their own solar revolution to commemorate their ancestors' struggle for unity, justice, and freedom. In what Hasenbrink calls prophetic pre-emption of permission, about 200 defiant Schönausers marched on Bergkirche and mounted nine unauthorized solar panels to the roof—producing the church's first kilowatt of electricity.

Hasenbrink likes to point out the amiable, tongue-in-cheek nature of their revolt, which included dressing up in costume and rewriting an old revolution song into a quirky environmental parody. He wisecracks about how Schönaus's 1848 mayor was hiding out while his 1998 counterpart was giving a revolutionary speech advocating for solar energy. And he emphasizes the many diplomatic efforts—his visits to many Lutheran and Catholic bodies and local city and town councils and his lobbying of politicians from all parties, explaining to them what his church was trying to do.

Yet the stakes were high, and Hasenbrink knew that he was putting his job and his reputation on the line. "In the lead-up to the 'revolution,' I had quite a few second thoughts," he admits, adding that he prayed for guidance from God. "I believe that God showed us the way, and together our community decided to not give up and to raise public awareness about this important issue."

Proving that not even the staunchest bureaucrats can withstand the will of an engaged and determined people, the landmark office gave the green light for the photovoltaic installation that same afternoon. The timing couldn't have been better. The Sladeks and their allies, after two victories at the polls and a national fundraising campaign, had just bought out KWR, gone online with their nonprofit power company EWS, and were looking for local energy providers. The European Union had just mandated the decentralization of its electricity markets, enabling smaller power companies to better compete. The Lutheran church council decided to make the Creation Windows into a pilot project, providing money for the installation. In June 1999, the state bishop himself attended the christening of the Creation

Windows. "Letting the bishop flip the switch that launched the generators made him so happy," Hasenbrink recalls with a smile, "because he could say he was a bishop with a heart for the environment and creation."

The Creation Windows started to pay dividends right away, thanks to new German laws subsidizing solar energy. "All of a sudden we started to make really good money," says Hasenbrink, "so we said, let's invest the money not only in upgrades like a new organ or energy-saving light fixtures, but in good causes aligned with the purpose of the church." One of the biggest successes of this creative communal brainstorming is "Sunny Youth," a program that installs solar panels on school roofs, with profits from the surplus energy going to at-risk youth.

Emphasizing ecumenical dialogue, Hasenbrink also began to travel across the country, giving advice to other churches, both Lutheran and Catholic, poised to follow Bergkirche's lead. "There are so many churches that are copying us now, or moving in the same direction, often with our support," he says. Even some Catholic churches' refusal to put solar panels on their sanctuaries because they think that a holy building shouldn't be used for secular purposes was only a minor hiccup. Despite his own belief that human faith has always been reflected in church architecture, Hasenbrink ultimately doesn't have a problem with Catholics putting their photovoltaic installations on the parish hall or church house. "It's all about creating common ground," he says, adding with a wink, "We were a little more generous with them."

With Germany's recent decision to phase out nuclear energy by 2022 and switch to 100 percent renewables by 2050, the small church community suddenly finds itself at the cutting edge of a new energy age. Together with EWS, the Schönau energy rebels' cooperative, which today employs more than 50 people, provides renewable power to 115,000 homes and businesses throughout Germany, and earned Sladek the Goldman Prize. They are leading the way in a shift of both policy and consciousness that few could have imagined just a decade ago. "If we wait until powerful leaders start to do good, the train will long have left the station," Hasenbrink says. "You have to start wherever you're at, but if it's many of us, then one drop will turn into a big lake. And that's what happened here." ■

Sven Eberlein (@ecomuse), a freelance writer based in San Francisco, blogs at *A World of Words*.

Poetry

BY BELLE FOX-MARTIN

Against The Night

We are the lay of the land—
pocked, hilled, knowing every ember
and seed imprinted on our bones.

Alone and together we, all paling petitions,
move forward on the ash road
hungering to be reawakened

By some whisper
spoken in a mother tongue
we think we used to know.

In the end there is the keeping on
toward hosannahs not yet shouted
up against the night.

Belle Fox-Martin is a United Church of Christ licensed minister in western Massachusetts.

Design Pics



A woman and child
attend a rally for
immigrant rights in
Washington, D.C.

FAITH AT THE TIPPING POINT

An interview with theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz on solidarity, public life, and the blessings that come when you really listen.

*Ada María Isasi-Díaz is a leading voice of mujerista theology, a liberation theology rooted in the everyday experience of Latinas. As her foundational 1996 book *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* puts it, her work aims at creating “a public voice for Latinas and capturing a political space for that voice,” including in academic theology. Isasi-Díaz is professor emerita of ethics and theology at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Sojourners associate editor Elizabeth Palmberg interviewed her in November at the Call to Action conference in Milwaukee.*

Elizabeth Palmberg: The U.S. will soon reach a demographic tipping point at which no ethnic group is in the majority. What challenges and opportunities do you see this presenting to Latina spirituality, and to the nation as a whole?

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: We're either going to have a radical change in perspective or continue to have enormous inequality and ill-treatment of people whom we see as “other”—who don't look like those in power, are not white, and so forth. The tipping point means that the hour of reckoning is coming. One of the things we need to work on is: How do we change? How do we understand differences?

We have always equated differences with incompatibility, but that's not true. Many differences are not incompatible. That's the kind of work that we need to demand of our leaders—church leaders, political leaders. We need to talk about differences; we can't just sweep them under the rug. Differences do not have to divide us; they can enrich us.

We have never realized the terrible loss it was for us in this country that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated; that César Chávez died too young. We lost leaders who could have taken us in another



direction, who could have turned civil rights into a much deeper reality impacting our culture, our spirituality, our religion. Unfortunately, other leaders have not arisen to help us deal with differences in a constructive way.

In your work, you've emphasized the importance of solidarity on many levels.

What theological insights do you have about how the U.S. as a community, and as a government, is treating immigrants?

I don't know that it's a theological insight. In moral theology and in ethics we capitalize on what are “human values,” and then we look at it from our Christian perspective. I'm not claiming that these are *only* religious values; I see solidarity as a human value.

One reason solidarity is all the more relevant is that now we live in this globalized world. When we talk about globalization, we always talk about money, capital, crossing borders back and forth. We never stop to look at the *people* who make globalization possible: the immigrants from all over the world who constantly cross borders back and forth.

In January 2011, I was in Africa. I talked to some Africans who had gone to Europe, were able to get legal documents in Europe, but then were having a hard time coming back to their countries. Their countries don't want them back because they want to get rid of more people. The fact that we have ignored the immigration issue as an element intrinsic to globalization is very important.

What about in the United States?

Here in the U.S., there's enormous ignorance of the

"Theology has to start by reflecting on the religious understanding and practices of the grassroots people."

whole issue, particularly of Mexican immigration. Very few people have ever heard that initially there was a guest worker program early in the 20th century, the *bracero* program, which brought Mexicans to the U.S. and treated them terribly—slave conditions. When there was no more use for them, they said, "We don't want you any longer."

Today Washington state, for example, is having enormous problems because it needs 10,000 people to pick apples, and there are few people in the United States willing to do that work. Recently, they were trying to have a new guest worker program. At the same time you have Alabama passing this terrible law against immigrants.

The lack of awareness of the movement of peoples around the world is disgraceful. For me, to work on getting people to know the history behind Mexican immigration is extremely important.

Do we know the history behind immigration from Central America? How is the United States, for example, responsible for it because of the contra war and what that meant in Nicaragua? How is the United States responsible because of the war the U.S. supported in El Salvador, and then NAFTA, and other treaties like NAFTA, that leave people no work in the countryside? There's just a lot of ignorance of the reasons behind why people have to come here.

Since *mujerista* theology begins from personal experience, can you describe a moment in your own life that helped form your work as a theologian?

I spent three years in the late '60s in Peru as a missionary. Those were the most formative years in my life. I worked in a very poor area of Lima, and it was there that I had the enormous grace—I cannot call it anything else—of beginning to understand the importance for the people, in their daily struggle, of their religion. I went there with the old missionary idea of "I'm going to teach them about Jesus." With the help of those who were involved in the beginnings of liberation theology, I came to realize that the poor were the ones who had so much to teach me.

I spent the three years there listening. It was then that I came to realize that theology is not just explaining church teaching and what the gospels say. No, theology has to start by reflecting on the religious

understanding and practices of the grassroots people. What does having faith mean for them? Who is God for them? How do they understand Jesus?

That was very early on. For a while I did not work on theology or in the church, but when I came back to do theology, Yolanda Tarango, the co-author on my first book, asked me, "Well, how are we going to do it?" I said, "Let's just gather the women and let them talk to us about who is God for them." And that's what we did. We spent weekends listening to them to come to an understanding of who and what the divine is for them—how God operates in their lives.

That's what I consider the kernel of *mujerista* theology—that method of listening to the religious understandings and practices of the women and using that as the source. It came from this enormous gift that was given me when I was in Lima when I was young, and that has remained with me all my life.

And you are writing a new book?

Yes, for the book I'm writing now, I've been talking with grassroots Latinas. You cannot imagine—it's such a joy! I spend about two hours with each of them, then I take a bus and the subway back home. I do so with this deep feeling of being blessed by all that they have shared with me and how they have entrusted their story to me.

I remember, growing up in the very traditional, pre-Vatican II Catholic Church, the priest would take the consecrated host and put it in the monstrance [a vessel used to display the Eucharist] and place it on the altar for adoration—that's how I feel after I meet with the women. It's as if I can touch God in a very special way. One day a woman shared her story with me and I thought, "I'm like a monstrance carrying her story in me." That for me was just immense grace.

Is there a particular insight you've gained in these interviews?

As researchers, we usually come with our questions. If I ask the women, "What do you think about justice?" they look at me blankly. So instead I ask them to tell me a little bit about their lives. I ask them, do you think what happened to you or what you did was fair? Now, that's language they understand. They'll answer—and I gain insight into what they think justice is about.

For this project, I've been asking them a particular question: "Do you think life has been fair to you?" It is amazing to me that women who have had very difficult lives say, "Yeah, life's been pretty fair." I say to myself, "How can you say life has been fair given all that you have suffered and endured?" But they always say things such as, "Well, I know a lot of people who have it worse than I do, or have gone through more difficulties."

Theologically, this has been a very important insight to me. They don't see themselves as victims. All of this theology of suffering—I've never agreed with it. I'm not saying that suffering is not there, but that's not where they draw their strength. They'll say, "You know, I'm suffering because of my son." But if you ask them, they see their lives as *la lucha*, as a struggle, precisely *against* suffering. They are not passive victims. They create meaning for their lives, no matter how terrible the circumstances are that they face.

And *la lucha* is connected with solidarity?

In my understanding of solidarity and compassion, it's not in any way about what I do or what I give others. It's the interconnections we create with other, how we support each other.

For an article on Christology in my book *La Lucha Continues*, I interviewed Latinas. I learned that they don't see God as the "magic God" who makes things happen. No. They see God as walking with them. God sustains them *en la lucha*, in the everyday struggle. That's who God is for them. That is what Christ means. Jesus is with them, sustains them. Not that Jesus solves their problems or anything like that.

All my insights come from talking with grassroots Latinas. Some people do not take my work very seriously. They think it's more like ethnography and sociology than theology, but you know what? If I, with my theological work, can validate how these women live their religion, then I will consider my work to have been worthwhile.

When Latinas say to me "Ojalá" ["God willing"], it's not just a phrase: It's their reality. They live in the sense that the divine is with them and helps them and moves them. Those experiences are always a blessing for me. I also like to do research in the library, but nothing compares to talking with the women. ■



Why are these people smiling?

Maybe they finally turned up the heat and won't have to wear those funny-looking hats indoors any more. Or maybe it's because as soon as the picture is taken they can stop resting their faces on their hands, which is just SO silly.

But probably it's because they're **Sojourners interns**—members of the 2011-12 intern class—and life is good. The Sojourners intern program has always been a place of growth and challenge for Christian young people who are serious about their vocational calling. They live together in community, work in our various departments, and learn important skills to make an impact for justice and peace in the world. Sojourners interns energize our work in messaging, publishing, and organizing. We think they're the best and the brightest, and we're always looking for more.

For more information or an application for Sojourners' yearlong intern program, which begins in September, visit **www.sojo.net** or call **1-800-714-7474**.

Deadline for applications for the 2012-2013 intern year is **March 1, 2012**.

*Above, Sojourners
2011-2012 interns,
clockwise from top left:
James Colten, campaigns;
Parker Haaga, marketing
and circulation;
Jack Palmer, media;
Karla Vasquez, mobilizing;
Jessie Choi, advertising;
Joshua Witchger, online;
Anne Marie Roderick, editorial;
Elisabeth Preisinger,
development;
Nicole Higgins, executive.*



By Shefa Siegel

DOWN AND **OUTRAGED**

A dispatch from the sinking middle class.

FOR A PERSON from the educated middle class who is going to pieces spiritually from lack of employment, often the hardest thing is maintaining appearances. Practically every cent and reserve of dignity is diverted into the illusion of gentility. Your clothes, technology, home, and public habits cannot be shabby. If a professional acquaintance suggests an expensive lunch, there is no avoiding it. If he or she says, "I'll just message you when I'm leaving for the restaurant," you must possess the proper gadget for receiving messages while in transit, for you can't await word on your home computer when the acquaintance expects to meet 10 minutes later.

Accompanying this financial shadow play is the anguish of what to call yourself. Diplomas, publications, and authenticity of intellect don't define your status—credibility comes from your institutional base. Establishing this base is

Reuters



Hundreds wait in line to enter a job fair in New York City in December 2009.

increasingly difficult. Look at the appellations people use when they publish little essays and commentaries: There are an astonishing number of fellows, advisers, experts, strategists, associates, analysts, and specialists, not to speak of freelancers and of course consultants, whose titles are not linked to any institution. Despite privileged backgrounds, this group's privilege is now almost entirely theoretical. Lack of property, land, stock, and savings point to the decline of their class and status. Still, their most sickening fear comes from finding themselves marooned outside institutions, with little hope of climbing back in and no skills on which to rely when their ideas and insights are of no monetary value.

Surprisingly few people are aware of

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Have? An excerpt from the novel *Accidents of Providence*

how things have changed. The difference between my generation—I am 37—and baby boomers is that in their day a person who was between things, stranded, or just wanted to be a hippie could go to an employment office in the morning and have a job in the mailroom of the Metropolitan Opera by the close of work. (A terrific essay called “1968” by the writer Andre Aciman illustrates this point.) What that generation did not grasp is how their sometimes sniggering attitude toward work was

Some imagine the labor market as a ladder where you merely slide to lower rungs if your usual perch breaks.

emboldened by an abundance of jobs.

Today, an un- or under-employed person is routinely told by people of means—including friends and family—that if work is unavailable in his or her profession, certainly low-wage retail or service jobs in a bakery, hardware store, café, boutique, or construction can be obtained. The advice-dispensers imagine the labor market as a ladder where you merely slide to lower rungs if your usual perch breaks. But this is oblivious to laws of supply and demand (too many people, too few jobs); that higher education is a disadvantage to securing manual employment (why train somebody who wishes to leave?); and to, in some cases, the availability of lower-cost migrant labor.

This obnoxious dismissal of economics is easy to understand: Systemic poverty terrifies people. The closer it comes, the more they resist facing the cold statistical reality that fate alone shelters them from similar descent. It must be something they are doing that keeps them employed—something the down-and-out are *not* doing that explains their misery.

Explaining my attitude toward this issue involves a certain amount of autobiography that I am reticent to write for precisely the reason already mentioned: By revealing my circumstances I will break the custom

Continued on Page 39

New & Noteworthy

BROUGHT TO THEIR KNEES

Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America is sociology professor Robert Brennenman's engaging study of faith and conversion among former gang members in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Oxford University Press



PLAIN, NOT SIMPLE

On Feb. 28, the PBS series *American Experience* will premiere *The Amish*, a two-hour, intimate exploration of faith and life in this private religious community. As the outside world presses in on them, what might the future hold? pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/amish

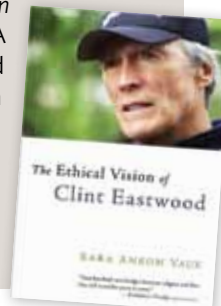


MAKE WAY

The daily meditations and activities in *Simplifying the Soul: Lenten Practices to Renew Your Spirit*, by Paula Huston, aim to help create space for God in cluttered lives. Written from a Catholic perspective, giving non-Catholics a few opportunities to try less-familiar disciplines or creatively improvise. Ave Maria Press

EMPATHY AND OUTCASTS

Film and religion scholar Sara Anson Vaux explores how “an icon of power honors the least among us with his art” in *The Ethical Vision of Clint Eastwood*. A deep, detailed, and accessibly written analysis of the moral perspective communicated through Eastwood's major films. Eerdmans



Sharia Hysteria

THE ISLAMOPHOBIC wave, which has been building in America at least since the “Ground Zero Mosque” controversy, washed up on the shores of pop culture at the end of last year. That’s when the Lowe’s chain of home improvement stores caved to far-right pressure and pulled its commercials from the TLC cable channel reality show *All-American Muslim*.

The pressure campaign against *All-American Muslim* was spearheaded by a fringe outfit called the Florida Family Association (FFA), which was able to generate a mass email campaign to advertisers based on a claim that the show “is propaganda clearly designed to counter legitimate and present-day concerns about many Muslims who are advancing Islamic fundamentalism and Sharia law.” This,



A scene from TLC's *All-American Muslim*.

claims about “sharia law” are right in lockstep with the official talking points of the Republican Far Right. In recent months, “sharia law” seems to have taken the place in their discourse that was once occupied by the phrase “homosexual agenda.” Both phrases were concocted to imply an overt conspiratorial threat that simply did not exist, and then lay that

Islamic states—they got an exemption.

According to *The New York Times*, this sudden emergence of “sharia” as a conservative buzz word is no accident. A story by Andrea Elliott traces the strategy to the connection between a lawyer (and former West Bank settler) named David Yerushalmi and a well-connected Washington neo-con operative, Frank Gaffney.

Yerushalmi provided the amped-up hyperbole; Gaffney provided the connection to real conservative organizations, and nature took its course.

All this fanning of flames about a supposed Muslim threat among us probably became inevitable the day that Nidal Malik Hassan opened fire at Fort Hood. The Right has thrived off of gay-bashing for more than a decade, but that is becoming a losing issue as the cultural tide has plainly turned. Muslim extremist football coaches are simply the next logical step in the right wing’s endless struggle to keep Americans paralyzed by fear.

It was probably also inevitable that self-identified Christians would become a central part of this campaign. I would recommend that all those conservative Christians so determined to defend the faith against an imagined Islamic threat check out the movie *Of Gods and Men* and see what some real-life Christians did when faced with a real threat from real radical Islamic terrorists—then ask themselves, “WWJD?” ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. Find out about his novel *White Boy* and more at www.dannyduncancollum.net.



Muslim cops and football coaches (oh my!)—the next step in the right wing’s efforts to keep Americans in fear.

according to the FFA, is because the show depicts Muslim cops and football coaches, but doesn’t show any “honor killings” or Muslims being persecuted for converting to Christianity.

A few things are shameful about this whole flap. One is that it was over such a tedious, mind-numbing reality show. Another is that a one-man band, which is what the Florida Family Association essentially is, could hijack the mass media stage without any questions being raised about its legitimacy until after the damage was done. The episode highlights all the potential dangers of instant “digital democracy” and sort of makes me nostalgic for the days of the pony express.

But the worst thing about the whole affair is that the FFA’s bogus

threat at the feet of a designated scapegoat group.

This has been all over the place lately. Newt Gingrich recently alleged that the imposition of sharia law threatens American civilization. Michelle Bachman and Rick Santorum both signed a pledge issued by an Iowa Religious Right outfit swearing to oppose both gay marriage and recognition of sharia law. In recent months three state legislatures (Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arizona) have passed bills ordering judges in those states to refuse to consider sharia, or any other foreign or religious law, in rendering decisions. Except, of course, when it involves corporations doing business with repressive

Continued from Page 37

of maintaining appearances. Candidly, I find this terribly frightening, and I would probably not do it except that I am convinced my experience is sufficiently typical to have symptomatic importance. I don't see many others in my situation speaking freely of their circumstances. This taboo must be shattered. Because our meeker caste is terrified of speaking truth, we accept the shame and humiliation of our idleness in isolation, where our loneliness tells us we've sinned.

For the last few years I worked for the World Bank, the Canadian and U.S. governments, three universities, and a multinational company. Before this, I wrote a doctorate on environmental issues, financed with a swanky U.N. consultancy I held for a couple years. Being a Ph.D. and working for these institutions seems prestigious enough, but my average annual income was about \$18,000 before taxes.

I often waited long stretches—once five months—for payments to arrive. There were gaps of five, six, or seven months between assignments; after the first year I burned through my savings. I considered jobs in western Newfoundland, southern India, Mongolia, and the Northwest Territories and would have taken any of these had they materialized. In three years, I lived in seven sublet apartments because I could not afford the startup costs of deposits and furniture. I lived in fear of medical calamity, and when this finally did happen to my partner, the consequences were disastrous. I survived only with the help of a generous grand-uncle and dear friends. Shortly before he died last March, my grand-uncle whispered, "It's the people who do not have anybody to help them who really suffer."

Perhaps the only advantage to being so unhinged these past years is that it permitted me to peer into many lives of equal despair. In every flat I had neighbors who were unemployed—a 35-year-old construction worker living with his mother; an engineer and father whose job was outsourced. We never commiserated or kept each other company. During a period of residence in Queens when I was "employed" for five months without pay, I overheard a nasty quarrel between the couple across the hall: She was tired of supporting him while he waited *five months* to be paid for services rendered. "That's just



Solaris

10 FOR HOME VIEWING

STUDIOS TYPICALLY don't use the early part of the year to release quality product—although the time it takes for "smaller" films to get outside New York and L.A. does mean that, depending on where you are, you might still be able to catch some gems released at the end of last year to qualify for awards. Movies such as the compassionate and warm **Le Havre**, about immigration and community; the suspenseful and troubling spy thriller **Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy**, which proves that if the truth sets you free, then deceiving people for a living can wreck your life; or the ambiguous end-of-the-world drama **Melancholia**, a film that warns about the dangers of cynicism and self-deception alike.

Otherwise, it's a perfect time to catch up on the 10 best Blu-ray releases of the past year. (As a bonus 11th I'd add **Reel Injun**, an informative look at the portrayal of Native American people in the movies.)

10. AI. Steven Spielberg's astonishing examination of what makes being human distinctive.

9. WEST SIDE STORY. Far more serious than its reputation might suggest, a truly great film about love, race, immigration, and the experience of economic marginalization.

8. BROADCAST NEWS. A previous generation's *The Social Network* in which TV news people actually talk about the ethics of their work.

7. CARLOS. The globe-trotting, more-than-five-hour-long treatment of the life of a megalomaniacal terrorist for hire; revelatory about the foundations of contemporary geopolitics and what never should have been called the "war on terror."

6. THE TREE OF LIFE. A poem about our place in the universe—God-imagining, life-affirming, mystery-respecting, and better experienced than argued about.

5. SOLARIS. Something like the Russian *Tree of Life*, as Andrei Tarkovsky's Christian imagination goes into the barrens of space in search of resurrection.

4. CITIZEN KANE. This has never looked better, nor seemed sadder: the life of a man who has found external power at the expense of a deadened soul.

3. THE KILLING. Stanley Kubrick's early heist thriller: vigorous, entertaining, and facing the darkness of greed.

2. FANNY AND ALEXANDER. Ingmar Bergman's affirmation of community contrasted with a coruscating critique of bad religion.

1. BLUE. WHITE. RED. A trio of films from Krzysztof Kieslowski, a man who made one movie each about the Ten Commandments and was instrumental in the abolition of the death penalty in his native Poland. Illuminating the qualities believed to be represented by the red, white, and blue of the French flag, "the three colors trilogy" invites the audience to reflect on our own sense and experience of liberty, equality, and community. They are, taken as a whole, among the most spiritually resonant and elevating films ever made. ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Durham, North Carolina

how it works,” he defended himself. “Do you know how hard it’s been? I don’t want to owe you money!” Through my door I heard rustling as she reached for her coat. Then they were both screaming and swearing, stinging each other in the most painful ways. Their lock turned and as she fled down the stairs I could hear him crying, alone, in the apartment.

My grand-uncle was of course correct. I was never hungry, filthy, or naked without shelter. What crippled me was the disgrace of being a drag on my family and the spiritual weakness I discovered in myself when I could not transcend my circumstances. People would say I should use the time to write a book. But a person needs more than just time to be productive—you also need peace of mind. Tranquility is hard to sum-

Orwell feared his fall from the “lower-upper-middle class” would dishonor his parents before their friends.

mon with the “deadening,” “debilitating,” “dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you.”

This phrase belongs to George Orwell, my inspiration for this essay. You might presume I am referring to *Down and Out in Paris and London*, his fine book about extreme poverty. That book’s focus on tramps was so taboo—in the heart of the Great Depression, mind you—no publisher wanted it until the socialist Victor Gollancz bought it in 1933. Orwell, aka Eric Blair, claimed his pseudonym a few short days before its publication, fearing his fall from the “lower-upper-middle class” would dishonor his parents before their friends. Poverty is embarrassing.

But the quote is from *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In 1936, Gollancz sent Orwell to northern England to report on the poverty of coal miners, which he did, splendidly. But he also enraged Gollancz by taking aim at socialists for obsessing over things such as drinking fruit juice, vegetarianism, and wearing sandals, that is, their aesthetic

humanitarianism and palliative programs that they suggested would help the working class. What outraged Orwell was the socialist middle class’ failure to grasp the change affecting the “private school master, half-starved free-lance journalist ... jobless Cambridge graduate, ship’s officer without a ship, clerks, civil servants ... and thrice-bankrupt drapers in the country towns”—the “sinking middle class.”

To underscore the point, Orwell opened his personal accounts to reveal that his income was only slightly higher than a miner’s, in effect showing that rather than studying the poor and the proletariat (*them*), socialists should accept that they are *them*. This insight is perversely modern. I assure you: There are people of tremendous success—senior political advisers or celebrity columnists—whose kin and friends are losing homes to foreclosure and jobs to the economic crisis. It is just not talked about.

Nobody is suggesting this struggle is worse than extreme poverty—“It’s the people who do not have anybody to help them who really suffer.” What it *does* suggest is how high and deep this depression reaches. We are in the midst of epidemic institutional failure; people whose fate placed them outside of institutions when the collapse happened may never scratch their way back to security. This is a grim future.

For now, my story concludes gracefully. By hook and by crook and a turn of great fortune, I landed in a job where I am compensated and appreciated. I could not be happier. The first time I used my keycard to access the elevator on a late night, I felt a mysterious, nearly delirious satisfaction that all my permits were in order—I was back inside and the doors opened for me without having to kick them down. But there were costs, some too painful to share, and preachers of petty teleologies such as “it was all worthwhile because it all worked out” ought to be ashamed, especially with all the others still on the outside looking in. ■

Shefa Siegel is associate research scholar at the Vale Columbia Center on Sustainable International Investment, a joint center of the Earth Institute and Columbia Law School, and a contributor to Haaretz Books and the online magazine The Mark (www.themarknews.com).

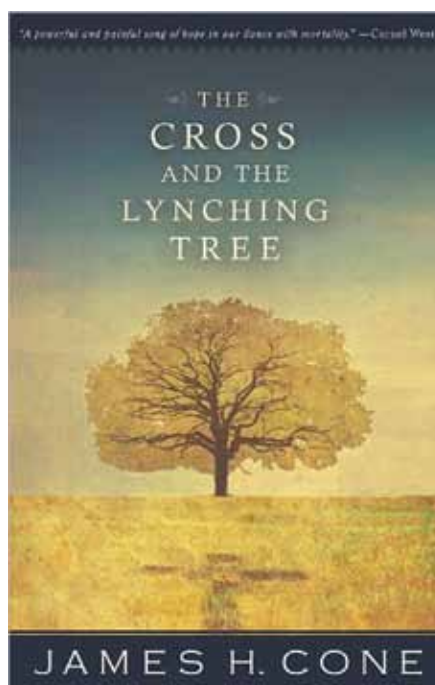


Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

WERE YOU THERE?

The Cross and the Lynching Tree,
by James H. Cone. Orbis.

JAMES CONE'S *The Cross and The Lynching Tree* argues a devastating point: American Christians grasp the horror and hope of the crucifixion *only* by looking at the lynching tree. The author anchors the cross within history, insisting that readers remember its inhumane absurdity. Cone alludes to this work when he contends, “to forget this atrocity leaves us with a fraudulent perspective of this society and of the meaning of the Christian gospel for this nation.” *The Cross* protests disembodied reflections by American theologians on



sin and inordinately European treatments of theodicy. This protest is both invitation and indictment—an invitation to grapple with God’s goodness in light of America’s social sin; an indictment upon those who gasp at the Inquisition and the Crusades while glossing over the horrors of lynching. Ida B. Wells, the famous anti-lynching activist, punctuates the latter point: “Our

Cone argues that American Christians grasp the horror and hope of the crucifixion *only* by looking at the lynching tree.

American Christians are too busy saving the souls of white Christians from burning in hellfire to save the lives of black ones from present burning in fires kindled by white Christians.”

Cone strengthens his crucifixion-lynching analogy by composing a nuanced allusion. He cites Acts 10:39—“they hung him on a tree”—to establish a visual connection between Jesus’ crucified body and the battered flesh of lynching victims. Although he does not mention it, Deuteronomy 21:23, which is interpolated into Galatians 3:13, merits mentioning: “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” Next, Cone deepens the biblical allusion by expounding upon the song “Strange Fruit.” Consider the song’s haunting lyrics:

*Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*

Abel Meeropol wrote the song, but Billie Holiday popularized it with her flawless and emotionally resonant delivery. Contrary to general misunderstandings, Cone patiently explains that both black male and female bodies constituted the “strange fruit” swinging in the breeze from Southern trees. Cone’s point is as much existential as it is theological: We gain an experiential understanding of the sweetness of Christ’s salvation by first encountering him as the strange—and bitter—fruit of American racism.

Upon finishing the book, many readers may wonder, is lynching an important but finally antiquarian interest? Three indicators suggest otherwise. First, Cone pinpoints the criminal justice system—the death penalty in particular—as a pernicious legacy of the cross and the lynching tree. Cone contends, “The death penalty is primarily reserved, though not exclusively, for people of color ... That is why the term legal lynching is still relevant.” The death penalty differs from lynching in important respects, but its disproportionate use on minorities and in cases where guilt is not

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CultureWatch

beyond reasonable doubt—Georgia's 2011 execution of Troy Davis comes to mind—is sufficiently alike to warrant the comparison.

Second, culturally, the noose retains its abhorrent allure as a symbol of hate. In early January, a group of white teen boys in Hickory, North Carolina, threatened a 14-year-old black girl with a noose. Such incidents are not merely Southern phenomena: Last December, an employee of the New York City Parks Department found a metal noose around the neck of an African-American baby doll.

Finally, Cone's reflection on lynching unravels the political fiction of American exceptionalism. From George Washington to Barack Obama, our

commanders-in-chief have routinely argued that our nation, since its inception, somehow surpasses others in virtue, dynamism, and other superlatives. Such hagiographies wither away when one considers that America's sons and daughters murdered 5,000 lynching victims between 1880 and 1940. If we must sing encomiums of America's beauty, let us also intone the bitter melodies of our brutality—including the cacophonous note of lynching. ■

Andrew Wilkes (@andrewjwilkes) is the faith and community relations associate for Habitat for Humanity-New York City and an affiliate minister at the Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York.

Fiction

WHAT KIND OF GOD DO YOU HAVE?

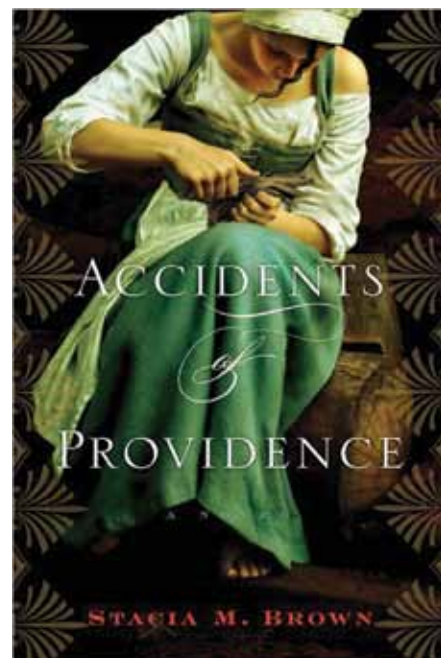
IT IS 1649. King Charles has been beheaded for treason. Amid civil war, Cromwell's army is running the country. The Levellers, a small faction of political agitators, are calling for rights for the people. And a new law targeting unwed mothers and "lewd women" presumes anyone who conceals the death of her illegitimate child is guilty of murder.

TWO GUARDS TOOK Rachel into the hold for condemned prisoners, a small structure of limestone adjacent to the main prison. Inside, she slipped on a carpet of excrement. One of the guards lit a torch and hooked it into the wall. The other attached her leg irons to one of six rings bolted into the stone. The first guard, a young fellow whose helmet seemed too large for his head, advised Rachel to bribe the warden to move up her execution date. "To escape the stench," he explained, gesturing apologetically at the floor as he left.

Rachel tried curling up on the end of a low wooden bench. She could hear rain against the roof. For a while she pretended to talk to her brother, but she could not hear him, could not imagine what he would say.

She did not pretend to talk to the child.

She would not even think the word *child*. She would push around it, leaving a wide berth; she would sweep all such thoughts in the corner. She would step over anything, avoid any obstacle, before she would think that word. Yet there it was. Every time



she tried to dodge it, misery would whisper the word for her, and a clean whistling breath rushed through her. The emptiness hiccupped and gabbled at her, slid her crosswise. She wondered what her mother would say to her now. Probably Martha Lockyer would tell her daughter to confess, which made sense if one had a list of things to repent. But what if a person did not know for certain? She shifted around on the bench. She would force her brother to talk to her.

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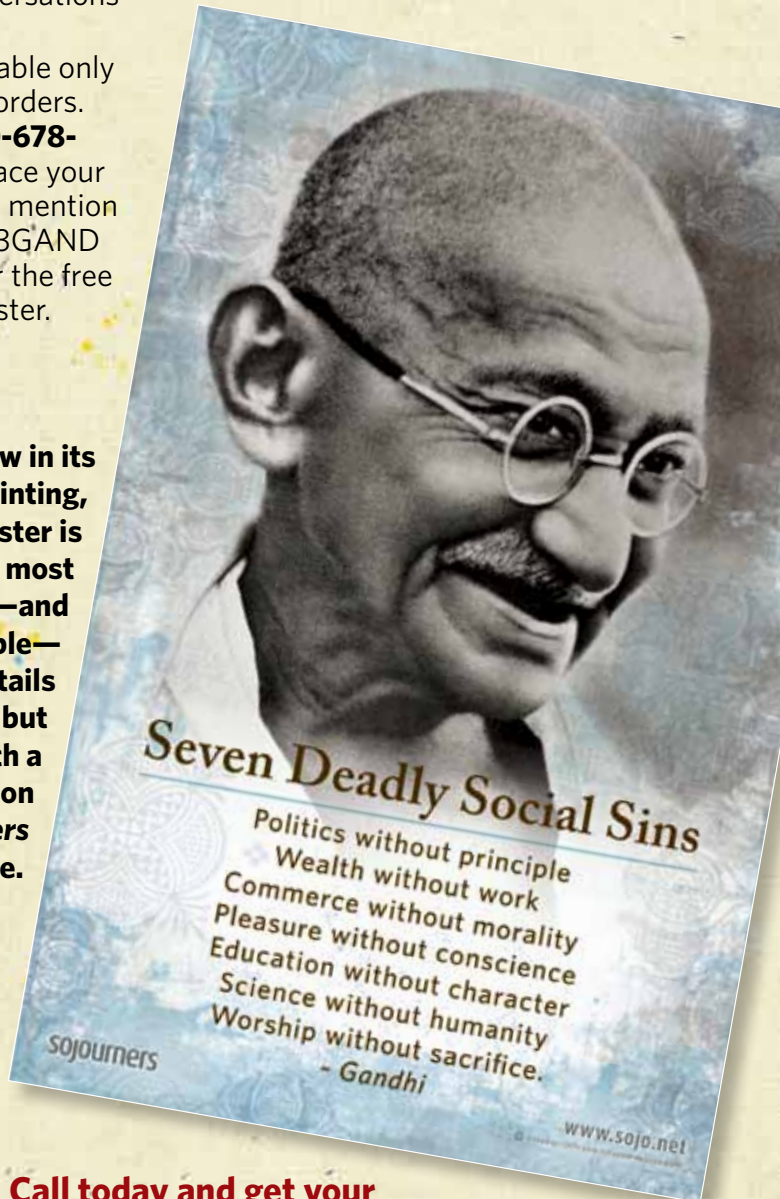
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She would conjure him up to calm herself.

She succeeded—too well. As soon as Robert appeared he was chastising her; he showed up midreprimand. He was saying: That's not the point. Whether you think you are guilty or not isn't the point.

It is, she replied.

No. The point is what kind of God do you have.

I don't have God, Rachel said. God has me. God has me in His cooking pot. I am being carried into the kitchen as we speak.

It was her father's God to whom she referred.

Robert was not having any of this. He never did permit his sister an ounce of self-pity, never showed her any sympathy. When Rachel's arms used to ache from cutting hides, he would tell her to count her blessings she had arms in the first place—he had seen men without limbs in the army, and they never lived. When her head used to pound from the fumes of the freshly dyed gloves, he would urge her to

"A woman who feels sorry for herself is a dead woman."

pray. Pray for God to ease my headache? she would say. No, Sister, he would reply. Pray for God to help you stop complaining. A woman who feels sorry for herself is a dead woman. Don't you give up. He'd delivered that last line on the morning of his execution, when Rachel had ducked into his tent a few minutes before Captain Savage and his men took him into the churchyard. Robert was too thin for the cloak they had thrown over his shoulders. He grinned when he saw his sister, kept grinning even as she threw her arms around him, even as the tent flap opened again and the light streamed in, and, following the light, the soldiers. "Don't you blame God for this," he had shouted to her as they pulled him away. "God has not got time to be the busybody most people make Him out to be. Don't you blame Him." ■

Excerpted with permission from the novel Accidents of Providence, by Stacia M. Brown. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

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Jubilee and Beyond

Continued from Page 26

has been cancelled. China and other growing economies are already giving out loans for projects.

A third area campaigners are challenging is illegitimate debt, a term that covers loans secured through corruption or that were given to rulers who used them for self-enrichment. The word “illegitimate” ought also to be applied to the controversial deals made by the U.K.’s Export Credits Guarantee Department, which has backed the Al-Yamamah arms deal to Saudi Arabia, Hawk jets to Indonesia, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in the Caucasus. Some of these deals ignore corruption, human rights abuses, conflict, and climate-change problems, and when the deals go

owned by Michael Sheehan, a former consultant to Morgan Stanley, paid just over \$3 million for an old Zambian debt dating back to the 1970s, then sued Zambia for \$55 million in the U.K. High Court in 2007. The vulture fund was awarded \$15.5 million by the British judge, who expressed moral disquiet at the claim—but in 2010, a campaign by Jubilee and associated groups led the government to pass a ground-breaking law that makes it impossible for vulture funds to win inflated claims through the British courts.

Yet the loophole remains in other countries, even allowing these firms to go to court against companies trading with their target country in order to divert payments to the vulture fund. F.G

It requires a mammoth Jubilee initiative to bring the problem of illegitimate debt to public awareness.

wrong, they become Third World debts. The U.K. Jubilee movement is campaigning against them. It requires a mammoth collective Jubilee initiative to bring the problem of illegitimate debt to public awareness and to demand that, as an initial move, individual governments and the international community bring in legislation to curtail specific examples of this kind of debt.

IN RECENT YEARS, Jubilee campaigners have also had to recognize the power and ruthlessness of “vulture funds.” When donor countries and institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, accepting the moral call of Jubilee, cancelled around \$90 billion in bilateral and multilateral debt to heavily indebted poor countries, this was a voluntary initiative, not binding on private creditors. This left some countries exposed to debt speculators: Vulture funds buy old debts of poor countries for pennies on the dollar, wait until the country starts to recover (because its big creditors have cancelled debts), then sue that country for a vastly inflated sum. The IMF estimates that vulture funds are claiming or have already won over \$1.5 billion from HIPC countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and the Republic of Congo. The challenge for Jubilee is to raise such an effective global outcry that law firms in the U.S. and Europe will be reluctant to represent vulture-fund claims in court and governments will close the legal loopholes.

There has been some success. A company

Hemisphere, a company run by American Peter Grossman, tried, unsuccessfully, to seize Congo’s embassy in Washington as a down payment on a debt! He was claiming \$100 million for an old debt, which originated under the regime of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and which Grossman bought for a reported \$3.3 million. Grossman took his claim around the world’s courtrooms, from Hong Kong to the U.S., unmoved by the argument that the Congo could better spend \$100 million on clean water, rebuilding war-ravaged towns, and lowering the maternal mortality rate. To bring legality in line with morality is a massive task for the Jubilee movement. If vulture funds are to be prevented from undermining the huge gains of debt relief, public opinion throughout the European Union and the U.S. must be mobilized to persuade governments to pass legislation.

The Jubilee movement played a vital, significant part in the fight for global justice—but it cannot be relegated to history. It must be there for the long haul, utilizing today’s social networking culture and confidence in popular democracy. For wherever there is human sin, there will be abuse of power, exploitation, and injustice. Countering that will require new spiritual energy, a great wave of support, and the power to persevere. ■

Elaine Storkey is president of Tearfund, a U.K.-based Christian international relief and development organization.

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Short Takes

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR...

Chris Hoke

Bio: Jail chaplain and gang pastor with Tierra Nueva in Skagit Valley, Washington; Underground Coffee Project co-founder. *Website:* undergroundcoffeeproject.com

1 What delights you in your daily work?

As a chaplain in a county jail, I get to meet and commune with some of the most interesting people in my community. When a few of them become my roommates, musical collaborators, groomsmen, business partners, or co-authors, it is pure delight.

I've found the greatest joy of the gospel to be what we at Tierra Nueva call "bridging divergent worlds": fly-fishing for salmon with young Chicano gang members. Doing theology in a jail with uncensored classmates already living a modern monastic life, well aware of their sin. Holding a collect call from prison on speakerphone above rows of organic kale, so the farmer can talk composting with a



with my friend Zach Joy, employing some of the millions of men and women in the "underground" economy who cannot get jobs after being released from prison. The tattooed former meth cook, Zach, is at the heart of the business—the artisan coffee roaster.

Zach's story is a portrait of beauty. So is the work of sustainable agriculture and faith community development in the mountains of Honduras, where Tierra

Nueva began in the 1980s with Bob and Gracie Ekblad. When the "fruit" of that work arrives in 152-pound burlap sacks of organic green coffee, and Zach's heavily-inked arms scoop the beans into the humming roaster, and he stands *praying* over each batch as it

The tattooed former meth cook, Zach, is at the heart of the business—the artisan coffee roaster.

man in solitary confinement who is starting to design a gang recovery farm for when he's released next year. It's hearing from suburban church ladies, like my mother, that the letters read through our ministry from a gang leader in prison made them cry—then hearing that they now write each other directly!

2 What frustrations do you face?

Banging on the doors of some churches and businesses and courtrooms that are used to the familiar way of doing things. It's also a frustrating process to let go of my incorrect assumption that men and women in those realms would be more reliable in their commitments than the folks we're working with in addiction recovery.

3 Tell us about the Underground Coffee Project.

One of my favorite experiences has been helping start a direct-trade coffee roasting business here, north of Seattle,

spills into the cooling tray ... the reconciliation of separate worlds has never smelled so good!

4 What gives you hope? I guess seeing, in the complications of this new business, other forms of redemption and sacrament. I never thought I'd work in selling and marketing. Honestly, from my educational background, capitalism is seen as almost criminal. So I have to smile, because as a jail chaplain, I believe the hearts of criminals can change!

I wasn't raised with much sacrament in church. But I kind of get it now: Few people literally "break bread" daily with one another, but more often people in our culture experience fellowship over coffee. I start seeing the parallels between the Body and the *bread* ... and then the Body and the international *bean*, broken and ground daily.

—Interview by Elizabeth Palmberg

Why I ♥ Credit Unions

I FINALLY “MOVED my money” from Wells Fargo to Lafayette Federal Credit Union. It’s local. It’s half a block from work. Charlotte, the branch manager, already knows my name.

Mind you, I never actually opened an account at Wells Fargo to begin with. I opened my account 20 years ago with a regional bank. But it was bought by Bank of America. I then switched to another regional bank. But it was bought by Wachovia. Last year, Wachovia was bought out by Wells Fargo. I’ve never been a big fan of the mega-money institutions. But ever since they drove our economy into a ditch and did it, in part, by taking the homes of poor people and minorities, I felt the



much of the experience of credit unions.”

The bottom line for a good credit union is that it exists to help people, not make a profit. For example, I became a member of my new credit union when I bought a \$50 “share.” As member I can vote for the governing board, which decides whether surplus should be distributed to members or reinvested. My credit union hosts a financial literacy center, is a member of the Credit Union National Association, and generates tens of thousands of dollars for the Capital Area Food Bank.

ONE OF THE first questions to ask when assessing one’s own financial social responsibility is: How quick does my dollar leave my neighborhood? Or as one community organizer put it: How many of your neighbor’s hands does your money pass through before it leaves your immediate community? Generally speaking, the bigger the financial corporation, the quicker your dollar exits.

If you want to build up local economies—independent businesses, public services, local government, arts and culture—then you want to keep those dollars circulating locally for as long as possible.

Another money question, taught to me by Equity Trust founder Chuck

Matthei, is: With whom are we called to enter into economic relationship? As a Catholic, this question is foundational. Any “capital” (labor plus land plus social equity) that comes under my stewardship is to provide for the simple, dignified livelihood of me and my dependents and to put at the service of those who are poor.

In *Charity in Truth*, Pope Benedict reminds us that “grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution.” In other words, when governments don’t properly regulate markets, then those same governments can’t ensure that their citizens are adequately provided for. The pope rightly criticizes unregulated capitalism as the “conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from ‘influences’ of a moral character.” The market is a tool that we use to allow fair encounters between people who want to exchange goods and services of equivalent value. But as Christians we think it must also exercise distributive and social justice, based on biblical mandates, in order to build a stable and nonviolent society.

My next financial step is to establish long-term savings in community development financial institutions and funds. CDFIs specifically target underserved populations and provide financial instruments where I can direct my “interest” toward particular needs such as inner-city education, low-income housing, environmental protection, and micro-loans.

In the end, I’m trying to develop a love that is wise by putting my money where my heart is. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



The bigger the financial corporation, the quicker your dollar exits your community.

biblical prophets giving me a kick in the pants. Hence, the next stage of my financial pilgrimage.

Credit unions, as we know them today, originated in Europe in the 1800s as financial self-help cooperatives among small business owners and farmers in particular locales, geared toward providing for and protecting their economic sovereignty. Eventually credit unions came to be organized around seven principles: 1) voluntary membership, 2) democratic governance, 3) member control of capital, 4) autonomy and independence, 5) education of members and public in cooperative principles, 6) cooperation between cooperatives, and 7) concern for the local community.

“If love is wise,” wrote Pope Benedict in his 2009 encyclical *Charity in Truth*, “it can find ways of working in accordance with provident and just expediency, as is illustrated in a significant way by

The Foolishness and Weakness of God

IN THIS LENTEN season we ask what is truly transformative. What practices are potent enough to dissolve the patterns of perception and response etched in the neural circuits of our brains, constantly reinforced by an environment obsessed with competition and the lure of individual gratification? This month's scriptures suggest that contemplative practice—the art of persistent gazing—is powerful enough when the focus is Jesus, the sign of what Paul calls “the foolishness and weakness of God.” When the Crucified One is the focus of our gaze, meditation can never be for us what much of our “spiritual-but-not-religious” culture is after. All manner of meditative practices are marketed as ways to soothe stress and “bring balance” to our over-stimulated lives. These practices carry the prestige of spirituality, but may actually reinforce our conformity to what scripture calls “this age,” if they merely palliate some of its toxic effects in our individual lives.

Shouldn't spirituality be spurring us to address the need for systemic change, not merely helping us to cope? For radical Christians, contemplative discipline is learning to see Jesus with the eyes of the heart in ways of worship and prayer that expose us to irradiation by his way of self-giving, even to death on a cross. We take the risk of being impregnated with a new self, Jesus' new self. This core identity in Christ imparts new instincts that enable us to decipher God's secret solidarity with the poor, excluded, and disempowered.



Martin Smith is an Episcopal priest serving at St. Columba's Church in Washington, D.C.

Knowing comes through living.

[MARCH 4]

No One There, Only Jesus

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 9:2-9

IN LENT WE are confronted with the risk of committing ourselves in faith to Jesus. We accept him as the ultimate model that has authority to shape our lives and as the embodiment of God's age-old promises for the fulfillment of humanity. Mark's account of Jesus' transfiguration culminates in a fearful experience of disorientation for Peter, James, and John. As they see Jesus shining in glory, they also take in the reassuring presence of Moses and Elijah, who represent the Torah and the Prophets, the dual pillars of God's covenant. But then these bastions of their faith disappear, and the three hear God insisting they listen to Jesus because he is God's Son, the Beloved. Awestruck, they realize “there is no one with them anymore, but only Jesus”

(Mark 9:8). What a terrifying risk to stake everything on Jesus, who dares to present us with claims that go beyond anything heard before!

The readings from Genesis and Romans challenge us to examine the risks of faith through the lens of Abraham's trust in God. God's promises to him and Sarah of a child and countless descendants are ludicrously implausible. Abraham has to leave the realm of predictability and common sense. Christians share the defiant faith of their spiritual ancestors by leaning into the seeming absurdity of the message of the cross, seeing by faith the ultimate disclosure of God in a crucified victim of imperial injustice and in the provocative announcement that he is risen from the dead.

[MARCH 11]

Creation and Destruction

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19;
1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

THERE IS IN scripture a tense interplay between God's creative and God's destructive energies. Creative energy is displayed in the splendor of the universe: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). It is equally at work in building human beings into communities that are just and life-affirming, so Psalm 19 passes seamlessly from praise for creation's beauty to glorifying God for teaching the ways of justice. Let's read the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 in the light of doxology; God's creative guidance for human flourishing is a thing of splendor.

In order to re-create, God must also exploit the forces of destruction. The evangelist John daringly relocates the story of Jesus' aggressive demonstration in the temple to the start of his ministry. Jesus goads the crowd, “Destroy this temple!” All the gospels hand down his biting sarcasmic challenge to the nationalistic Jerusalem establishment to bring their self-destructive policies to a catastrophic climax, provoking the Romans to obliterate that establishment once and for all. The fourth evangelist is completing the gospel decades after the destruction of the temple, and for him the desolation has opened up the space to recognize more clearly the new locus of divine presence in the world: the risen body of Christ, to which all are being drawn, where all belong, without distinction of race or origin.

Paul's blazing words in his first letter to the Corinthians speaks also of God's destructive energy. “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Through the message of the cross, God undermines the validity of human philosophizing and discredits nationalistic, tribal religiosity once and for all. Neither is capable of recognizing the power of God's vulnerability and self-giving.

These are the scriptures that can give us the courage to see God at work in the

historical forces that are dismantling so many elements of traditional Christianity in our own time. Will we have the courage to praise God for the divine energies that are destroying, clearing, demolishing, and purging throughout the churches, as we fulfill our vocation of staying faithful and imaginative in the death-throes of the long Constantinian era of Christianity?

[MARCH 18]

Look To Be Healed

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22;
Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

AT THE HEART of the third chapter of John's gospel glows the most quoted verse from the New Testament, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ..." (3:16). Much less familiar is the image that precedes it, of Jesus the Son of Man having to be lifted up, as Moses had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. The reading from Numbers recounts this legend from

Evangelism focuses on drawing people into a lived experience of service.

Israel's wilderness wandering. Moses had a bronze snake fabricated from metal, and mounted it on a pole. While gazing on this menacing object, victims bitten during an infestation of venomous snakes found themselves being healed.

We are to trust a strange analogy with the contemplation of Jesus hoisted up on the cross. In an utter paradox, this vision for the believer is radiant with healing power. Those who gaze on it experience a burning away of all denial of human brokenness and their own share in it, and at the same time see the cross as the display of God's limitless healing compassion. God lifts Jesus for us on the cross, and lifts him to vindication in the resurrection, and we are drawn with him into intimacy with God. The passage from Ephesians revels in this experience of being lifted out of estrangement into this new state of reconciliation.

[MARCH 25]

Mere Seeing or Real Knowing?

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16;
Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

OUR VOYEURISTIC CULTURE revels in images and sightings of celebrities. There may be a warning for us in the coolness in John's gospel with which Jesus responds to the desire of certain foreign pilgrims to get a look at him while he is in Jerusalem for the Passover. The disciples relay the Greeks' request, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." But Jesus makes no arrangements to satisfy their curiosity about him. There is nothing to gain in a mere meeting. There is only one way of getting to know who Jesus is: actually undergoing the loss of self, the giving of one's self, which is the essential meaning of his life. To meet Jesus where he is involves undergoing that inner experience of death and rebirth. "Those who love their life lose it ... Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (12:25-26).

Painting a fascinating picture of Jesus as a person is never enough to bring about a real encounter with him. But if we welcome people as companions in our own work of witness, ministry, service, and prophecy as Christians, then there is a chance that in this spending of self they will discover who Christ actually is, recognizing him intuitively by faith in the experience of service. The writer to the Hebrews teaches that even Jesus himself had to learn the true meaning of his identity through the experience of suffering and the discipline of hard obedience. Knowing comes through living. We have to live out an obscure call before we can claim to see.

In embracing an evangelism that focuses on drawing people into a lived experience of service, we play our part in ushering in the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of God's future, when women and men will come to know the Lord through experience rather than external instruction. ■

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There's Something in the Water...

AS A GENERAL rule, it's a bad idea to skip church. Not only could you miss an instructive sermon, but you also risk the wrath of a vengeful God who, depending on His or Her mood on the day of your transgression, could be thumbing through the Old Testament for ideas. On a recent Sunday morning I decided to risk all and go to the gym instead.

This was a mistake.

Distance swimming is my exercise of choice, but counting laps is

does this a lot, and had I not checked him with a preemptive glare he would have launched into one of his boring monologues that has nothing to do with me. (Is it too much to ask that I be The Boss in my own fantasy?!)

Suddenly a huge wall of bubbles erupted in front of me, followed by the breaching of an enormous humanoid figure, clad all in black, spouting air and spray from what I assumed was a blowhole on its

solitary figure just surfacing, no doubt waiting for instructions for when to begin feeding on swimmers in the other lanes, eventually working their way to the elderly women in the hot tub, who seemed unconcerned of the approaching danger. (Hot tubs can do that to you. I never use them for fear of becoming so relaxed I might be lulled into flashbacks of my youth, when I would sometimes blissfully decide against the inconvenience of leaving my bed to go potty.)

Ken Davis

Who knew hideous sea creatures had their own club?

about the most boring thing a person can do, aside from sitting through an instructive sermon. So I try to occupy my mind with various reveries of proven distraction. This time I had selected the Rock Star Scenario, and after a few laps my mind was fully into the altered state of being the lead guitar player at a stadium full of screaming fans. Backing me up was Paul McCartney on bass, Bruce Springsteen on rhythm guitar, and my granddaughter on drums. Despite her small size, she can lay down a driving beat and only occasionally needs to be nudged upright by stagehands. (She's only 1 year old and tends to fall over if nobody's watching.)

I had just launched into a blazing riff that Eric Clapton would have envied when I noticed Springsteen stepping up to the microphone. He

back. Streaming out the rear of its head was a thick strand of blond hair, presumably the undigested remains of its last victim.

In disbelief I wracked my brain for any previous sighting of foreign life forms in the pool, but only recalled a sock I once saw floating in the deep end. (Turns out it was mine. Long story.) And then, all around me, the water churned violently as a dozen more of the creatures surfaced in a loud sputtering of spray. Before transitioning to a frantic backstroke, I briefly wondered if these identical creatures were related—perhaps a family whose Christmas photo you wouldn't want to receive—when they pulled off their head coverings to reveal various undigested human faces. (Good grief, don't these creatures ever SWALLOW?!)

They then turned toward a

Turns out I was sharing the pool with a scuba class, and why they don't post signs about this sort of thing is a mystery to me. Maybe pool officials assumed everybody else was at church and wouldn't run into the Sermon-Skipping Scuba Sinners From Hell. Why they were in my lane was quickly explained by an apologetic instructor who said that the beginner's class was working on "lateral control." So I didn't mention the "bladder control" issues which at that moment I was more concerned about. (Another few seconds of sea creatures and I might have had to sprint for the hot tub.)

So always go to church, my friends. God has a sense of humor and sometimes gets laughing so hard that, well you know. (Where do you think rain comes from?) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

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